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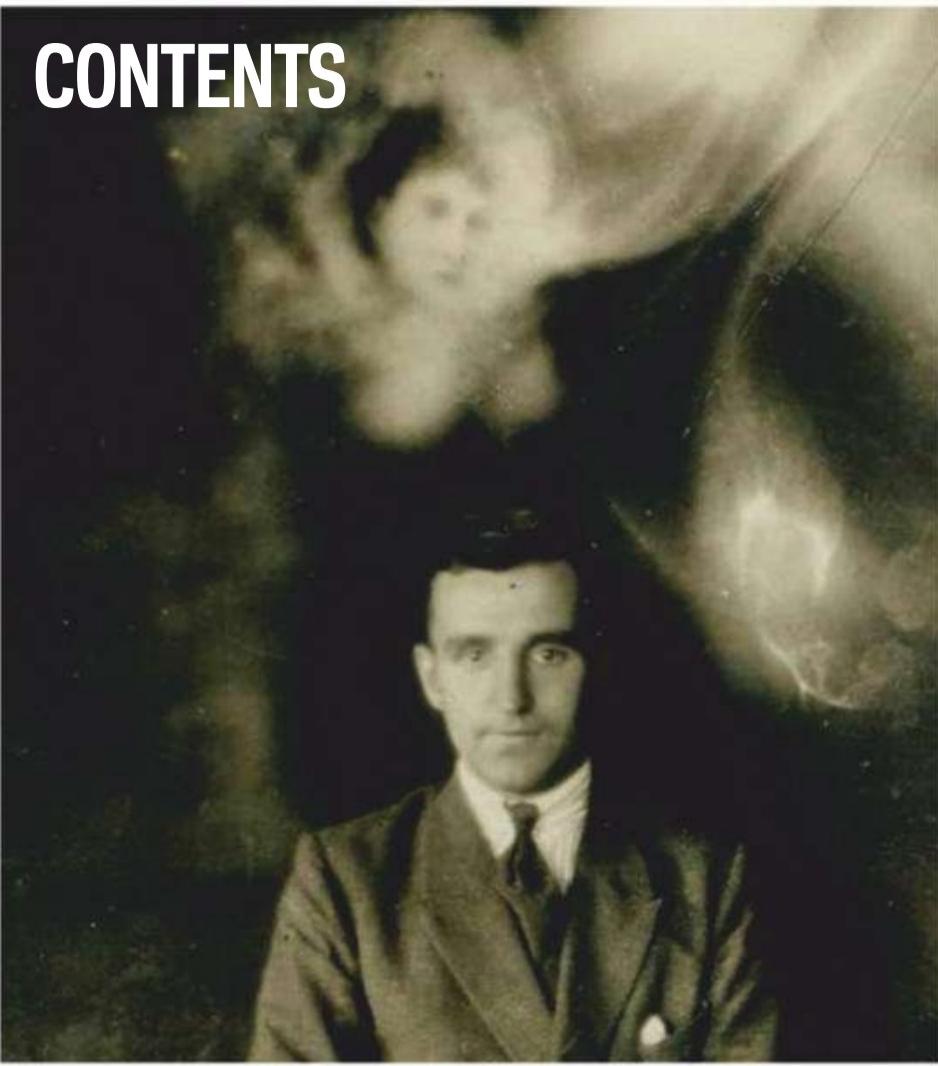
WARNING: The Circus of Horrors contains some nudity and language of an adult nature, it is not suitable for children. This show contains nuts!

HOLLAND Den Haag Big Top	Peterborough Key	Southsea Kings Theatre	Cheltenham Town Hall
3-5 January 2019	29 January	01733 20 7239	0844 576 2210
Glasgow Kings Theatre	Hastings White Rock	bit.ly/20KcUjb	cheltenhamtownhall.org.uk
9 January 2019	30 January	01424 462288	15 March
Birmingham The Alexandra	Hertford Theatre	whiterocktheatre.org.uk	Eastbourne Hippodrome
10 January	31 January	01992 531500	01323 802 020
Cardiff St Davids Hall	Clacton Princes Theatre	hertfordtheatre.com	16 March
11 January	1 February	01255 68 6633	royalhippodrome.com
Southampton O2 Guildhall	Wellingborough Castle Theatre	princesstheatre.co.uk	17 March
12 January	2 February	01933 270 007	Winchester Theatre Royal
Coventry Belgrade	Reading Hexagon	castletheatre.co.uk	01962 840 440
15 January	4 February	0118 960 6060	17 March
Hereford Courtyard	Halifax Victoria Theatre	readingarts.com/hexagon	theatreroyalwinchester.co.uk
16 January	5 February	01422 351 158	Llandudno Venue Cumru
Stoke Victoria Hall	Port Sunlight Gladstone Theatre	victoriatheatre.co.uk	01492 872 000
17 January	6 February	0151 643 8757	18 March
Newcastle Tyne Theatre & Opera House	Worcester Swan	gladstonetheatre.org.uk	Kilmarnock Palace Theatre
18 January	7 February	01905 611 427	01563 554 900
Woking New Victoria Theatre	Swansea Grand Theatre	worcesterlive.co.uk	21 February
19 January	8 February	01792 475 715	Dundee Whitehall Theatre
Swindon Wyvern	Aberdare Coliseum	bit.ly/2MbMqmR	01382 434 940
20 January	9 February	03000 040 444	22 February
Torquay Princess Theatre	Warrington Parr Hall	rct-theatres.co.uk	aberdeenperformingarts.com
22 January	10 February	01925 442 345	23 February
Weymouth Pavilion	Preston Guild Hall	pyramidparrhall.com	motherwell Concert Hall
23 January	11 February	01772 804 444	01698 403 120
Poole Lighthouse	Telford Oakengates Theatre	prestonguildhall.co.uk	24 February
24 January	@ The Limes	01952 382 382	culturenl.co.uk/entertainment
Exeter Corn Exchange	12 February	theplacetelford.com	Arbroath Webster Memorial Theatre
25 January	Billingham Forum	01642 552 663	01241 435 800
Plymouth Pavilions	13 February	forumtheatreBillingham.co.uk	26 February
26 January	Sheffield City Hall	01142 789 789	webstertheatre.co.uk
Yeovil Octagon	14 February	bit.ly/2Ds8hcV	02392 828 282
27 January	Wolverhampton Grand	01902 429 212	kingsportsmouth.co.uk
Dartford Orchard Theatre	15 February	grandtheatre.co.uk	17 February
28 January			Weston Super Mare Playhouse

18 February	Crewe Lyceum	01270 368 242	15 March	Cheltenham Town Hall
19 February	Morecambe Platform	crewelyceum.co.uk	16 March	Eastbourne Hippodrome
20 February	Kilmarnock Palace Theatre	01524 582 803	17 March	Winchester Theatre Royal
21 February	Dundee Whitehall Theatre	bit.ly/2QnqOD	18 March	theatreroyalwinchester.co.uk
22 February	Aberdeen Beach Ballroom	01382 434 940	19 March	Llandudno Venue Cumru
23 February	Motherwell Concert Hall	whitehalltheatre.com	20 March	Liverpool Arena
24 February	Aberdeen Performing Arts	01224 641122	21 March	Southport Theatre
25 February	Doncaster Dome	aberdeenperformingarts.com	22 March	Barsley Metrodome
26 February	27 February	01698 403 120	23 March	bpl.org.uk/metrodome
Sunderland Empire	Doncaster Dome	culturenl.co.uk/entertainment	24 March	Consett Empire Theatre
27 February	28 February	Arbroath Webster Memorial Theatre	25 March	empireconsett.co.uk
Gt Yarmouth Hippodrome	Gt Yarmouth Hippodrome	01241 435 800	26 March	Oswaldtwistle Civic Theatre
1 & 2 March	1 & 2 March	webstertheatre.co.uk	27 March	civicartscentre.co.uk
Crawley Hawth	Crawley Hawth	0844 871 3022	28 March	Leeds City Varieties
4 March	4 March	bit.ly/20038wu	29 March	cityvarieties.co.uk
Bournemouth Pavilion	Bournemouth Pavilion	01302 370 777	30 March	High Wycombe Swan
5 March	5 March	bit.ly/2QObstZ	25 March	wycombeswan.co.uk
Barnstaple Queens Theatre	Barnstaple Queens Theatre	01493 844 172	26 March	Middleton Arena
6 March	6 March	01279 431 945	27 March	Leicester Haymarket Theatre
Kettering Lighthouse	Kettering Lighthouse	hippodromecircus.co.uk	28 March	haytheatre.com
8 March	8 March	01271 316 063	29 March	Harlow Playhouse
Maidstone Hazlitt	Maidstone Hazlitt	bit.ly/2xehpG7	30 March	harlowplayhouse.co.uk
13 March	13 March	01622 758 611	31 March	Stafford Gatehouse
Scunthorpe Baths Hall	Scunthorpe Baths Hall	bit.ly/2N3gJiF		Folkestone Leas Cliffs Hall
14 March	14 March	01724 290 640		01303 228 600
		scunthorpetheatres.co.uk		bit.ly/2N16GdL

T = tickets also available to purchase from
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STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: haunted theatres, Romanian polt, vampire burials, Dracula coins and much more.

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

FACING FRONT, LOOKING BACK

RIP STAN LEE

Along with the rest of the world, we at Fortean Towers were saddened to hear of the death of Stan Lee in November 2018 (obit. p30). At 95, The Man had enjoyed a good innings, but the loss of such a formative figure in modern popular culture – and, indeed, of someone we had blithely assumed would somehow always be there, because he always had been – was as keenly felt by us as it was by the millions of others around the world whose imaginations had, at some point in their lives, been fired by the work of the indefatigable force behind Marvel Comics.

Your current editor could probably date his first realisation that such a job existed to an early engagement with the bombastic blasts and alliterative asides he read in Stan's Soapbox and Bullpen Bulletin columns; perhaps our slightly obsessive need to dot *FT* reports with constant cross references to earlier issues finds its origin in the equally obsessive asterisked footnotes in Stan's Marvel stories, forever sending readers back to long-forgotten issues or sideways to current cross-overs. One thing we can say for sure is that our fabulous founder, Bob Rickard, who launched *Fortean Times* on an unsuspecting public back in 1973, was a True Believer back in the Marvel Age of the 1960s.

In his tribute to the late Steve Moore (FT314:24-26), Bob recalled how his friendship with Steve began back in 1967 when they met through fellow comic fans and creators Steve Parkhouse and Barry Windsor Smith, who had, Bob recalled, "noticed a letter of mine in one of the Marvel comics (I forget which one)." Now it can be revealed – thanks to some serendipitous comic perusal – that what we assume to be the letter in question appeared in *Daredevil* #25, cover-dated Feb 1967, and was from one Robert Rickard, 91 Streetsbrook Rd, Shirley, Solihull, Warks, England. As a tribute to Stan, and a fascinating bit of pre-*FT* ephemera from over 50 years ago, we present it in full:

"Dear Stan and Gene [Colan, the artist]
My colleague, John Tedder, and I are post-graduate Industrial Design students

at the Art College in Birmingham. Together we script, draw, and ink (sort of) a campus comic. I'm telling you this because it gives us some insight in appreciating the other side of Marvel. Thus, we wonder at the sheer technical accomplishment of so many exciting characters, plots that are at all times strong, a new approach to artwork and colour, and an appeal that is anything but juvenile. And month after month! We discovered Marvel about a year ago and immediately noticed its superiority.



So we hollered all over the place that, at last, here was the Pukka Publication. It was no sweat anyway – the appeal of your ishes lies in the intelligence and genuine creativity put into them. Marvel is synonymous with a sense of fun, and enjoys a good laugh, often at its own expense. You Bullpen Buddies don't talk down to your public, they become part of a special in-crowd. The plots betray an all-round knowledge of myth, magic, philosophy, pseudo- and other science – we suspect

you have a mind similar to the late Charles Fort. All of your Marvel creations will surely be imprinted on the Akasha as the Ultimate. You all really enjoy this work – and it shows. But, all we really wrote to say – thanks! We remain your appreciative acolytes and Marvel missionaries -- "

A FORTEAN IN PARIS

Parisians had a fortean treat at the end of last year, when the third 'Salon des arts visuels', organised by the association De l'Art à l'Est on the initiative of the *Mairie* of the 11th arrondissement, was held from 13–16 December at the Salle Olympique de Gouges. One of the artists exhibiting was none other than our own Capucine Deslouis (seen above), whose beautiful illustrations from our 'Blasts from the Past' section were on display. We were delighted to hear that Capucine was awarded first place in the Prix du Public. We hope to bring you further coverage next month.

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

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THE STORY BEHIND THE ILLUSION



A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

DOUBLE OR QUIT

World leaders rumoured to be dead... or possibly replaced by clones



CARL COURT / GETTY IMAGES

In an email entitled "It's Real Me, President Buhari Responds to Cloning Allegation", Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari (above) denied claims that he had died and been replaced by a Sudanese impostor, scotching a rumour that had circulated on social media for months. Buhari, running for re-election in February, spent five months in Britain in 2017 being treated for an undisclosed illness, prompting the rumour that he had been replaced by a lookalike from Sudan called Jubril, an idea spread by videos on YouTube and Facebook. "It's the real me, I assure you," insisted Buhari, addressing Nigerians in a town hall session on 2 December in Poland, where he was attending a conference. "A lot of people hoped that I died during my ill health. Some even reached out to the Vice President... because they assumed I was dead. That embarrassed him a lot of course. He visited me when I was in London convalescing." The Nigerian leader said he was

looking forward to celebrating his 76th birthday on 17 December. *Guardian*, 3 Dec 2018.

A day after Buhari's clone denial, President Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon was forced to address rumours of his demise. These followed his collapse at a conference in Saudi Arabia on 24 October, with sources telling Reuters he had suffered a stroke. Ondimba, born Alain Bernard Bongo, has been President of Gabon since 2009. His office had said merely that he was suffering from fatigue and "bleeding", fuelling rumours he had died. Bongo's "proof of life" video shows him talking to King Mohammed VI of Morocco.

Many years ago, FT received a curious two-volume self-published book setting out to show that Pope Paul VI (1897-1978) had been replaced by a near double. The author's thesis was backed up by many photographs allegedly showing the subtle physiological differences between the original cleric and his impostor. One very

popular rumour of those days, of course, was that another Paul, the Beatle McCartney, had been replaced by a double.

Reports of the death, or imminent death, of Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe for 30 years, crop up every few years, often when the old bruiser disappears from public view for several days. In 2009 there were rumours that he was close to death in a Singapore hospital, and in 2016 it was reported that he had died mid-air on a trip from Dubai, which Comrade Bob laughed off upon landing at Harare airport, saying: "Yes, I was dead... I resurrected as I always do once I get back to my country." Vladimir Putin vanished for almost two weeks in 2015 and the rumour mill went wild. Some said he had died, others speculated he had had botched plastic surgery, or had travelled to Switzerland for the birth of a secret lovechild. More likely rumours included that he had the flu or back trouble. The Kremlin refused to comment.

In July 2011, reports that Jiang Zemin, who led China from 1989 to 2002, had died began circulating after his absence from celebrations of the 90th anniversary of the Communist Party. He eventually reappeared in October, at a commemoration event in Beijing. Rumours that Kim Jong-un had been assassinated began spreading in 2012, shortly after he became the leader of North Korea. The "assassination" was said to have occurred in Beijing with rumours spreading via Chinese social media platform Weibo. People had retweeted

a tweet from a fake account that mimicked a BBC account confirming the death. Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, has twice had his death or imminent death falsely reported – first in 2007 and again in 2009. Both times the rumours originated or were fanned by the same person, leading American neoconservative Michael Ledeen. *Guardian online*, 4 Dec 2018.

The clinical equivalent of all this is Capgras delusion, where the subject believes that someone well known to them has been replaced by an exact double or clone. Psychiatrists Joseph Capgras (1873-1950) and Jean Reboul-Lachaux first described this experience in 1923 under the title *L'illusion des Sosies* [FT123:14, 133:16, 145:17, 352:56-57]. The name derives from the story of Amphytron and his servant Socias. Zeus lusted after Amphytron's lovely wife, Alcmene. With Amphytron away in battle, Zeus sends Mercury ahead to impersonate Socias. The fake Socias tells Alcmene that Amphytron has returned from the wars and the unwitting wife then joins in prolonged union with Zeus, who had taken the form of her absent spouse.

The English name for *L'illusion des Sosies* has become simply Capgras Syndrome, part of a collection of syndromes where the 'sufferer' confuses the true identity of others. The first documented patient with the syndrome, described by Capgras and Reboul-Lachaux, was a 53-year-old woman who believed her husband, children, domestic servants and others had been replaced by impostors. She even insisted she had two or three doubles who were part of an elaborate plot to steal her identity and inheritance. *Washington Post*, 10 April 2018.



NUMISMATIC NIGHTMARE

Bram Stoker's vampire gets a coin of his own

PAGE 12



DISTURBING THE DEAD

Should burial grounds be dug up for HS2?

PAGE 18



CAVE OF THE EWOKS

The mystery of the performing Thai trolls

PAGE 27

THE CONSPIRASPHERE



NOEL ROONEY looks at a new Cambridge University survey that has the stated aim of developing a 'natural history' of conspiracy theory – but is it even asking the right questions?

SURVEYING THE CONSPIRASPHERE

On 24 November, a major research project into belief in conspiracy theory, undertaken by Cambridge University and YouGov, published the results of an international survey testing the traction of a number of conspiracy theories in nine countries – eight in Europe, plus the United States. The survey also asked about trust: in government, the media, academia, and the people around us, presumably to establish a context of sorts for the specific questions – 10 of them – which constitute 'conspiracies' for the purposes of the study.

The survey uncovered a consistently low level of trust in government, traditional media, religious leaders and corporate bigwigs. More surprising is the relatively high level of optimism for the future; and, perhaps, the responses that suggest most people are more or less satisfied with the political system we live under, albeit they would prefer it to be run by nicer people.

Given the purposes of the study, the specific questions are a little odd. Six of the questions pertain to standard Conspirasphere themes: secret high-level contact with aliens; the artificial origins of AIDS; Holocaust denial; the global warming hoax; the vaccine conspiracy; and the grand narrative conspiracy (aka the world is run by 12 bearded men under a hill). Two questions are liminal in conspiracy terms, and both are about immigration: whether the government is hiding the actual numbers of immigrants in the country; and whether Muslim immigration is part of a secret plot to turn the country to Islam. The latter is arguably a conspiracy theory in some countries, most notably France, where it is known as '*Le grand remplacement*', but it is very context-dependent; the former is surely more an indicator of distrust in authority, and in any case lacks the factor of purpose which is central to most conspiracy theories.

The other two questions are borderline

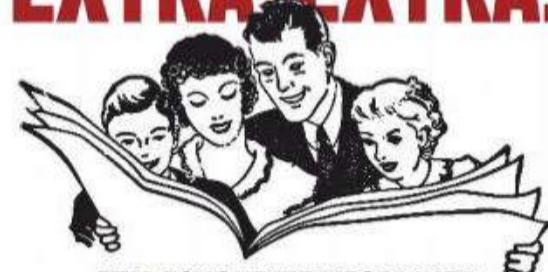
at best. "Do the rich run the country?" is likely to be answered with a "yes" by plenty of people who would scoff at the Conspirasphere. "Secret plots that harm the nation are more common in this country than in other countries" seems a curiously relative way of asking if people believe in the Deep State; it's also likely to elicit very different responses in different political climates.

Notable absences? Well, the currently most popular theories missing from the survey include the Flat Earth and lunar landing hoax, and it is odd that no reference is made to more established ones like the JFK assassination or 9/11 attacks; these all have real traction and lie more comfortably within any definition of conspiracy theory than some of the survey's questions. They would also give a feel for the relative status of different theories, and how some have become embedded in popular culture to the extent that they may not be thought of as conspiracy theories by a large number of people. Which makes one wonder if the survey got rather side-tracked by those trust issues; there is an implicit suggestion here that distrust in authority is both a necessary, and a sufficient, criterion for belief in conspiracy theories. This is arguable, and clearly depends on the specific theory. People who think the Beatles were all killed in the 1960s and replaced by body doubles are asking very different questions about the nature of reality than, say, anti-vaxxers.

To put it simply: it is generally true that conspiracy theorists distrust their governments (QAnon being the exception that proves the rule); but people who distrust their governments are not necessarily conspiracy theorists. This survey seems confused on that point and, as a result, is more redolent of insecurity than dispassionate enquiry.

The survey can be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/2KEkl5p>

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

MAN IS JAILED IN FAKE DVD CASE

Loughborough Echo, 24 May 2017.

Man buried by cheese

(Adelaide) Sunday Mail, 8 May 2016.

4 YEARS IN PRISON FOR USING A PLASTIC BAG

D.Mail, 29 Aug 2017.

Scam cash spent on trip to moon

Durham Advertiser, 31 May 2018.

COWS ALLOWED TO VISIT SWEDISH NUDIST BEACHES DURING HEATWAVE

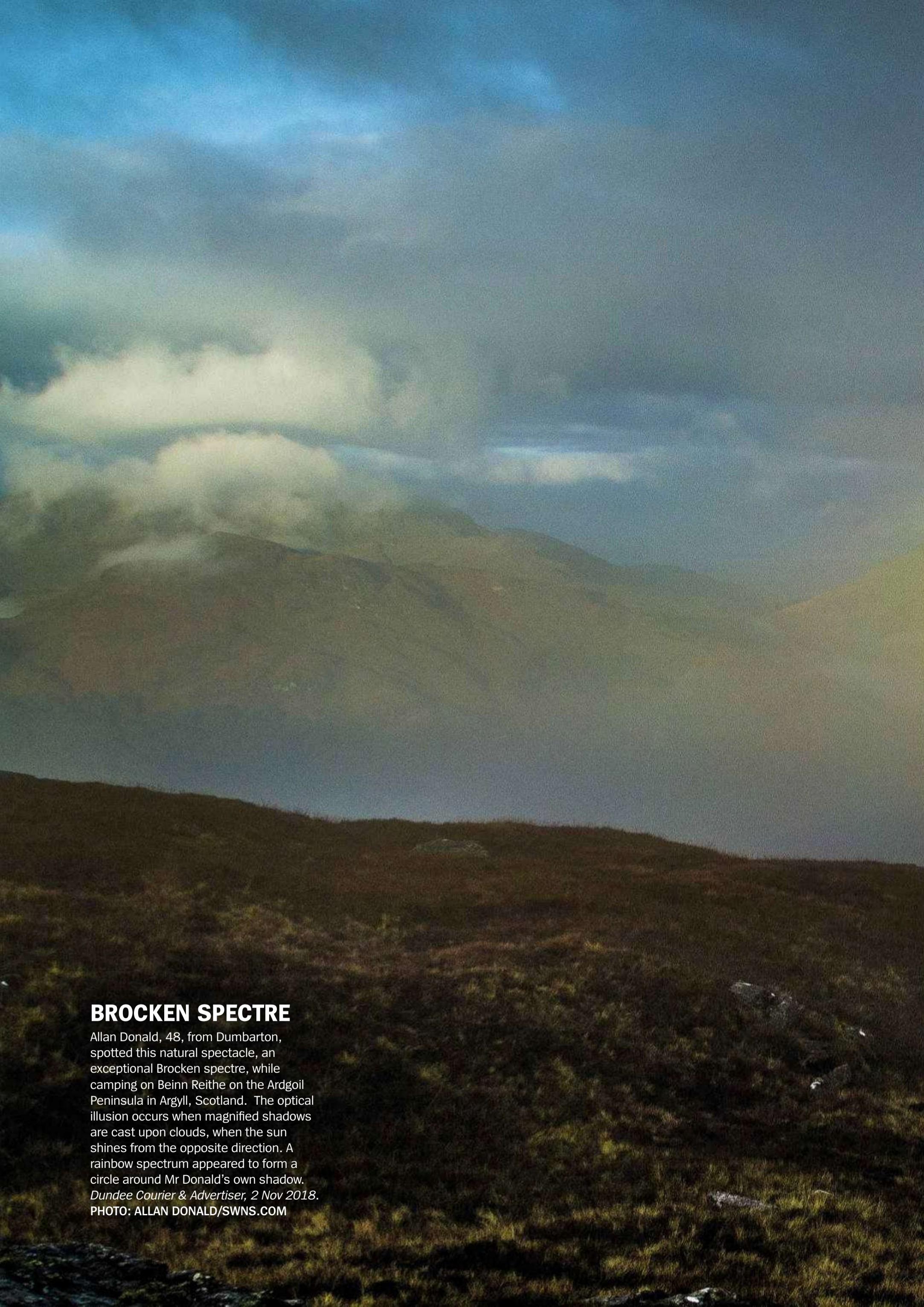
BBC News, 10 Aug 2018.

Slaughtered pigs now outnumber Spaniards

D.Telegraph, 20 Aug 2018.

JOBS IN THE PIPELINE AT FORMER SEWAGE WORKS

Wolverhampton Chronicle, 27 Sept 2018.



BROCKEN SPECTRE

Allan Donald, 48, from Dumbarton, spotted this natural spectacle, an exceptional Brocken spectre, while camping on Beinn Reithe on the Ardgail Peninsula in Argyll, Scotland. The optical illusion occurs when magnified shadows are cast upon clouds, when the sun shines from the opposite direction. A rainbow spectrum appeared to form a circle around Mr Donald's own shadow.

Dundee Courier & Advertiser, 2 Nov 2018.

PHOTO: ALLAN DONALD/SWNS.COM





STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

PISCINE AESTHETICS

At fish beauty contests in Singapore, armed guards escort rare breeds. Plastic surgeons for fish have sprung up. Procedures include eyelid lifts and fin enlargements. Some owners, known as arofanatics, put a fish through a tanning regime to perfect their hue. *Economist*, 15 Sept 2018.

SIMIAN SERVICE

Bus driver M Prakash was suspended after video showed him holding onto the wheel of the bus with one hand while a langur monkey perched on the wheel and steered the vehicle for almost 10 minutes near Davangere, Karnataka state. The monkey was a pet belonging to one of the 30 passengers (none of whom complained). [UPI] *vice.com*, 8 Oct 2018.

MONKEY NUT

A drunk was beaten up by a pack of 10in (25cm)-tall squirrel monkeys after breaking into Wellington Zoo, New Zealand, to try and catch one. The next morning, John Owen Casford, 23, was discovered with a broken leg, two fractured teeth, a sprained ankle, and bruises on his back. The monkeys were distressed and two injured. Casford was jailed for the assault and unrelated violent offences. *Sun online*, 5 Sept 2018.

HEAVY METAL

Russian police arrested a man for stealing more than 275 tonnes of railway track. Armed only with a spanner and pliers, the unemployed 38-year-old, who was caught red-handed, stole pieces of metal that connected the rail tracks. We are not told over what period of time the metal was taken. He faces a jail sentence of up to five years. (*Sydney D.Telegraph*, 3 Aug 2018).



HEAVENLY VIEWS

A selection of strange things seen in, or in some cases from, the sky



MID-AIR POLE

A passenger on a flight from Malaga in Spain to Bristol 6 December 2016 spotted this mystery object poking through the clouds. The photograph was taken above the Bristol Channel around 11am as the Ryanair Boeing 737 was passing over Brean Sands in Somerset. The unnamed man used flight map information to gauge he was at an altitude of 4,600ft (1,400m) at the time and posted a picture on an image-sharing site, commenting: "If it's not something on the ground, which I find inconceivable as I was over the sea, then what is it?" Some suggested it was an alien craft, while others saw it as a scratch on the plane window. Many years ago, an FT correspondent had a similar sighting of a long pole sticking up through the clouds, and provided a sketch. It is currently eluding us. *Bristol Post*, 8 Dec 2016.

RECTANGULAR ICEBERG

NASA has released this photograph of an iceberg with perfectly straight edges and right-angled corners. The mile-wide "tabular iceberg", which is showing 10 per cent of its mass above the water, was seen floating off the Larsen C ice shelf in the Weddell Sea off Antarctica in mid-October. An expert said the sharp edges probably indicated that it recently detached from an ice shelf and was photographed before sea and wind could erode its edges. It was not known whether the split was due to climate change or a natural iceberg life cycle. *BBC News*, 23 Oct; *D.Telegraph*, 24 Oct 2018.



NASA

TOP: The mysterious 'cloud pole' posted on Reddit. BELOW: The spectacular rectangular iceberg, photographed from an aircraft.



SIDELINES...

BLOOD SUCKER

On 8 September, while his parents were away, Cambodian farmer Run Reach, 24, drank a bottle of wine, then caught his three dogs, a pregnant hen and a female cat, and killed them all by sucking their blood. His parents returned and found him asleep and looking like a "fierce ghost". His mother had him taken to the chief monk in the village to be exorcised. The monk threw holy water on him, after which he returned to normal. He stayed at the pagoda for further cleansing rituals. *Khmer Times (Cambodia), 11 Sept 2018*,

POLISH DAREDEVIL

On 22 July, Andrzej Bargiel, 30, became the first person to ski from the summit of K2 (28,251ft/8,611m), the second highest mountain in the world and the most difficult to climb. He also completed the gruelling climb to the top without supplementary oxygen. His brother filmed the seven-hour descent using a drone. *The Week, 25 July 2018*.

EWE NEED TO BE CAREFUL

A teenager, walking with a group on Slieve Bearnagh in Northern Ireland's Mourne Mountains on 17 August, was hit by a sheep that had jumped from an adjacent crag. A 17-person rescue team quickly arrived and stretchered him down to an ambulance. His injuries were not serious. It is believed the sheep left the scene unaided. *irishtimes.com, Metro, 19 Aug 2018*.

FALLING FAT CAT

A 56-year-old man, strolling along Via Tripoli in Turin, northern Italy, in July 2017, was hit on the head by a 13lb (5.9kg) cat that had fallen from an eighth-floor balcony. The cat died and the pedestrian suffered serious trauma to his neck and vertebrae. He is suing the cat's owner for damages. *D.Telegraph, 7 Sept 2018*.

HANKY-PANKY?

A woman, nude from the waist down, fell through the ceiling of a fast food restaurant in Kingsport, Tennessee, and into the kitchen. The police report contains no possible explanation for why Harley C Morton, 26, was in the ceiling of Cook Out on East Stone Drive. *Knoxville (TN) News-Sentinel, 2 Nov 2018*.



ABOVE: The cloud face photographed by Nichola Nichols. BELOW: A giant eye over Leeds shot by Walter Graham Telford.

HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

Nicola Nicholas captured this striking cloud face as she harvested Chardonnay grapes at Sandhurst Vineyard in Kent, which is owned by her and her family. The clouds formed two deep eye sockets with the pupils looking down, and there was the vague outline of a nose and cheekbone above the well-defined dark shape of a mouth. Ms Nicholas, 55, said the

simulacrum hung in the sky for at least seven minutes. "It was very, very weird," she said. "It was like a divine power looking down on us." *express.co.uk, 18 Oct 2018*.

EYE IN THE SKY

This giant eye was spotted in the sky over Leeds on 29 April 2017 by Walter Graham Telford, 46. Known as *stratocumulus standing lenticularis*, such

lenticular clouds form when strong, wet winds blow over rough terrain. "It disappeared as quickly as it had formed so I got a few shots on my iPhone and then it vanished," said Mr Telford. "People I've shown [the photograph] to have made comments about how it's proof big brother is watching us while others have said it's God's eye watching over us," *dailymail.com, 5 May; Sun, 6 May 2017*.





STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

EASY MISTAKE TO MAKE

When thunderstorms knocked out power for homes in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on 6 September, a 30-year-old woman grabbed what she thought was a candle, but accidentally lit a quarter stick of dynamite, left in her basement by previous occupants. She suffered severe facial injuries and may lose fingers. *cbsnews.com, 8 Sept 2018.*

ORGAN TALLY

A close study of the Bayeux Tapestry reveals that it depicts 93 penises, five on men and 88 on horses, with William the Bastard's steed having one much longer than King Harold's. Of the human toppers, four are erect, while the fifth hangs limply on a dead soldier. *D.Mail, 13 July; Sun, 14 July 2018.*

CHASED BY A SQUIRREL

Police in Karlsruhe, Germany, rescued a man being chased by a baby squirrel. Officers responded to his urgent call for help and arrived to see the creature still terrorising him. It had probably become separated from its mother and targeted the man because it was in search of a new home. It abruptly fell asleep and was taken into custody, becoming the new police mascot, dubbed 'Karl-Friedrich'. *BBC News, Guardian, 10 Aug 2018.*

MARINE BARKING

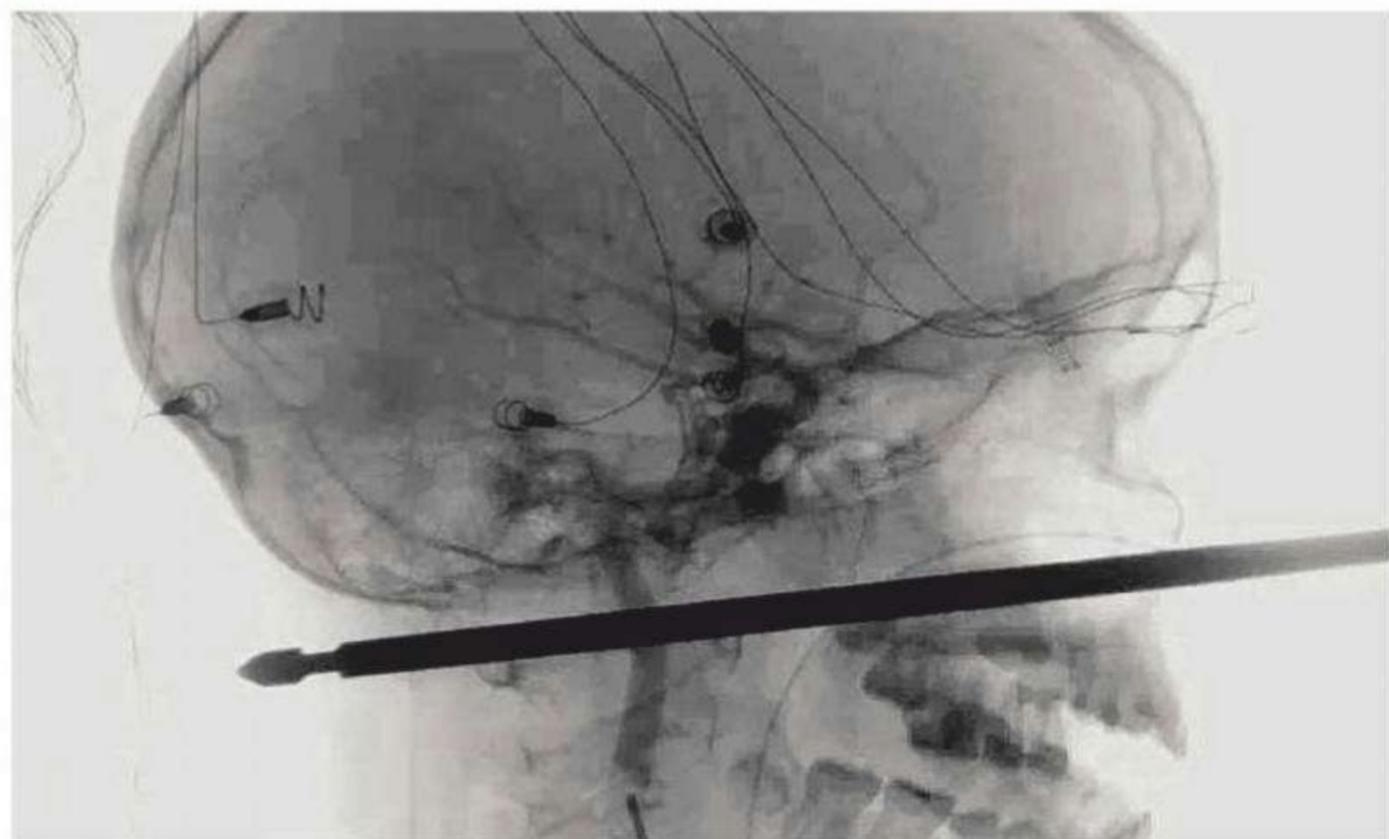
On 15 September lifeboat crews launched a rescue bid for a "Jack Russell" in trouble off Roker Pier, Sunderland. When they arrived, however, they realised it was a small seal barking. An RNLI spokesman said crews only became involved in dog rescues to prevent owners risking their lives and going into the water. *BBC News, 17 Sept 2018.*

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

A paranoid schizophrenic carrying a dildo and wearing women's clothing and a blue wig strangled a female jogger he believed to be ex-Prime Minister David Cameron. Callum McPhee, 29, of Reading, was on a skateboard when he attacked the 29-year-old woman in rural Oxfordshire in July 2017. She played dead and managed to escape. McPhee was given an indefinite hospital order. *Metro, 31 Aug 2018.*

MEDICAL BAG

Miraculous survivals, disappearing brains, and how smartphones steal your memories



MEDICAL NEWS NETWORK

ABOVE: An X-ray showing the foot-long meat skewer penetrating Xavier Cunningham's head.

- On 8 September, 10-year-old Xavier Cunningham was attacked by a swarm of yellowjacket wasps and fell from a tree house in Harrisonville, Missouri, face-first onto a foot-long (30cm) metal meat skewer fixed into the ground. The thin spike penetrated around 6in (15cm) beside his nose to the back of his head. It "miraculously" missed his eyes, brain, spinal cord and major blood vessels. Over several hours, a team of doctors at Kansas University Hospital successfully removed the square rod – which made for a trickier surgery than a rounded skewer due to the sharp edges. Koji Ebersole, director of endovascular neurosurgery at the hospital, said: "I have not seen anything passed to that depth in a situation that was survivable, let alone one where we think the recovery will be near complete if not complete." *BBC News, theguardian.com, 12 Sept 2018.*

- A British teenager shot himself through the head with a speargun bolt while on holiday in Italy. Devon White, 14, from Chelmsford in Essex, was in a dinghy with his elder brother and uncle off the resort of Sperlonga on 13 July when the 12in (30cm) bolt went through

It miraculously missed his eyes, brain, and major blood vessels

his diving mask and his left eye socket and penetrated the top of his skull. He was helicoptered 100 miles to hospital in Rome, remaining conscious until his arrival. The bolt was successfully removed by a team led by Professor Alberto Delitala, who said Devon had already recovered the sight in his eye and he did not expect him to suffer permanent brain damage. The bolt had passed between his eyeball and the side of the socket next to the nose without penetrating the eye itself; and it had passed through his brain without hitting important blood vessels or areas controlling vital functions. "He has a weakness in his left hand, which is gradually improving," said Prof Delitala. "It's extraordinary how a foreign body could pass through the brain and cause such modest damage." There was a risk of infection, and Devon received large doses of antibiotics. *Times, 28 July 2018.*

- Doug Bergeson, 52, came close to death on 25 June 2017 after shooting a nail into his heart. He was working on framing in a fireplace at his house near Peshtigo in northeast Wisconsin when his nail gun accidentally fired, sending a nail ricocheting off some wood and into his chest. As he tugged at his sweatshirt, he realised only about an inch of the 3.5in nail was sticking out of his chest. "I could see the nail moving with my heartbeat," he said. He calmly drove himself to hospital and parked his pickup truck before walking into the emergency room. The nail had hit his heart, and was only 1/16 of an inch (under 2mm) from a major artery. He spent just two days in the hospital before returning home to recover. *[AP] 16 Aug 2017.*

- On 8 December 2017, a 73-year-old cattle farmer from Victoria, Australia, identified only as 'Jim', was leaning over the front of his motorbike, checking his West Gippsland property for hatching grasshoppers, when he hit a hole, and was sent sailing over the handlebars, banging his head on the ground and breaking his neck. "I got on my feet," he said. "I knew there was something seriously wrong as my head



wouldn't stay up." He got back on his bike, held his head up by his hair and rode 500m (1,540ft) to his house to call for help. He was then taken by ambulance to hospital. He had fractured his top two vertebrae, C1 and C2 – considered one of the most severe spinal cord injuries. He had a 'halo' and four bolts in his skull, but was expected to make a full recovery. *Canberra Times, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 16 Jan 2018.*

- An 84-year-old man was referred to A&E in Coleraine, Northern Ireland, by his doctor after several months of feeling unsteady on his feet and experiencing falls, and three days of weakness in his left arm and leg. Blood tests showed nothing out of the ordinary and there were no signs of facial weakness, speech problems or confusion. However, a CT scan and an MRI brain scan showed an air-filled cavity in the right frontal lobe of his brain, together with a benign bone tumour, essentially a bony growth, within his nasal sinuses. This had been growing slowly and putting pressure on the base of his skull, causing a small erosion. Air was then able to move through this erosion and into the skull. Dr Finlay Brown, co-author of the report in the journal *BMJ Case Reports*, said the eroded area and the tissue above it had formed a one-way valve. "The air can get in," she said, "but it can't get back out again." The brain scan images appeared to

show a chunk of the brain had disappeared, but in fact the air cavity had compressed the brain. The man was offered the option of surgery to release the pressure, but declined, given the possible risks. While the man's left-sided weakness had gone after 12 weeks, what would happen next was uncertain. "In theory the brain could possibly absorb, or the body could reabsorb, some of the air, but it could also get worse," said Dr Brown. "We just don't know." *Guardian, 16 Mar 2018.*

- A boy who had a large portion of his brain removed because of a tumour is still able to function normally. He lost a third of the right hemisphere, which deals with visual processing, sights and sounds. Three years on, he has normal intellect and visual perception, because the rest of his brain "reorganised itself", said scientists at Carnegie Mellon University, Pennsylvania. Now 19, he wants to be a neurologist. *Metro, 9 Aug 2018.*
- In an attempt to show off in front of his friends, a Mr Zhang swallowed an 8in (20cm) steel spoon. The Chinese man, in his 20s, carried the spoon inside him for about a year and somehow it didn't bother him that much – until he was punched in the chest on 22 October. Hardly breathing and in pain, he sought medical help at the Xinjiang Coal Mine General Hospital. X-rays showed the metal object stuck inside his oesophagus, and



ABOVE: The 8-inch spoon Mr Zhang had swallowed and carried inside him, lodged in his oesophagus, for a year. It was removed after a two-hour operation.

it took a complex operation of more than two hours to remove it. *rt.com/news, 2 Nov 2018.*

- A 36-year-old British woman blew her nose so hard she temporarily lost her sight and broke a bone in her face. She was at work when her vision went. Hours later, blood started dripping from her nostril and the skin around her left eye started to swell. She also had stabbing pains in her eyes and a piercing headache that took her to A&E at North Middlesex Hospital in London. A CAT scan showed a fracture in a bone (the *lamina papyracea*) surrounding the left eye socket. Such fractures are usually caused by a punch or a blow with a blunt object. Surgeon Dr Sam Myers said it was the first time he had heard of severe injury caused by nose-blowing. *British Medical Journal, via D.Telegraph, 8 Oct 2018.*

- The obsession with smartphone photographs is affecting our most precious memories, according to new research. Scientists have found that people become so distracted by taking pictures that they can't actually remember what they have seen. The study, published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, said using smartphones alters our memories by taking us away from the moment. The researchers took hundreds of participants on a self-guided tour of a church and encouraged them to note what they saw. A week later, they were quizzed on the visit. Those armed with iPods and cameras, who took pictures as they went, recalled it less accurately. According to the science, when we create memories, neurons in our brains link sensations such as what something looks or feels like. But when we are distracted, these are not stored in our brains but instead live on forever (or until the Great Computer Crash) on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Previously, studies have shown how constantly having a mobile phone in our hands has a "brain drain" effect that reduces people's intelligence and attention spans. *D.Telegraph, 30 Mar 2018.*

SIDELINES...

TINY STOWAWAY

A man in his 60s, in Dalian, China, who complained of pounding sounds in his ear was found to have a spider inside, spinning webs. *Sunday People, 9 Sept 2018.*

PLAGUED BY FIRE

Bunmee Phoomsrijan and her son run a *luuk chin* (meat ball) business in Ban Palan sub-district, north-east Thailand. On 29 August 2018 a fire broke out. Since then, fire has broken out more than 50 times all over their house, including 13 separate incidents in one day alone. Nobody knows why, and Bunmee, her son, his wife and child were forced to move out and sleep in tents. There were plans to install CCTV to try and find a cause. *Amarin TV via thaivisa.com, 9 Nov 2018.*

FLIPPING HECK

An amorous bottlenose dolphin has prompted Landévennec in western Brittany to ban bathing from its beach, because swimmers might be hurt by its frisky behaviour. The 10ft (3m) mammal, nicknamed Zafar, has tried to prevent several swimmers returning to shore, using its nose to push one woman up into the air. Often clearly in a state of sexual arousal, it has rubbed up against kayaks and other boats. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 28 Aug 2018.*

LINDA REINCARNATED

Sir Paul McCartney told the *Sunday Times* that once when he was in the country he saw a white squirrel that he believed was his late wife Linda who had "come back to give me a sign. It was a great moment... I have no proof that it was her at all, but it was good for me to think that." Linda died of breast cancer in 1998. *D.Mail, 3 Sept 2018.*





STRANGE DAYS

PINNIPED PERILS

The mystery of the Hawaiian monk seals with eels up their noses and the fur seal that slapped a kayaker in the face with an octopus

EELS IN SEALS

In a recent photo shared on Facebook by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program (HMSRP), a Hawaiian monk seal lies against green foliage with a white-and-brown spotted eel hanging from its nostril. According to the HMSRP, the incident is just the latest in a phenomenon that was first recorded in 2016 – and researchers are profoundly puzzled. About two years ago, for example, another seal was found with about 4in (10cm) of eel hanging out of its nostril. The team was worried about the potential danger to the seal: it was wheezing a bit, and if it dived deep or tried to swim, the nose eel might have created a passageway for water to enter the seal's lungs. The research team decided it was worth capturing the seal – for no more than 60 seconds – to try to remove the nasal invader. The removal took no more than 45 seconds, even though that eel turned out to be almost 2ft (60cm) long. "We are pretty sure the complete animal was removed, as the skull was found, but some fins or spines may have come off the eel during the removal," the researchers wrote. "The seal did not struggle very much, and no blood came out when the eel was being removed." This latest nose eel was also removed, with a "slow, steady pull". The seal



NOAA FISHERIES / BRITTANY DOLAN

was unharmed; the eel, however, perished.

Although they have been monitoring the behaviour of the endangered pinnipeds for over 40 years, the researchers don't know why the juvenile seals have all of a sudden started

getting eels stuck in their noses. "We don't know if this is just some strange statistical anomaly or if we will see more eels in seals in the future," they wrote. atlasobscura.com, 5 Dec; independent.co.uk, 7 Dec 2018.



BAREKIMI / TWITTER

SEALED WITH AN OCTOPUS

A kayaker was given a very close look at New Zealand's wildlife when a fur seal slapped him in the face with an octopus. Kyle Mulinder received a surprise tentacle-lashing while paddling off the coast of Kaikoura in the South Island. The moment was caught on camera by his colleague, Taiyo Masuda. Mulinder later recounted watching the seal fight the octopus before it leapt at him. "We were just sitting out in the middle of the ocean and then this huge male seal appeared with an octopus and he was thrashing him about for ages. I was like: 'Mate, what just happened?' It was weird because it happened so fast but I could feel all the hard parts of the octopus on my face." (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, (*Queensland*) *Courier-Mail*, 28 Sept 2018.

NO NEED TO SEARCH THE SKIES

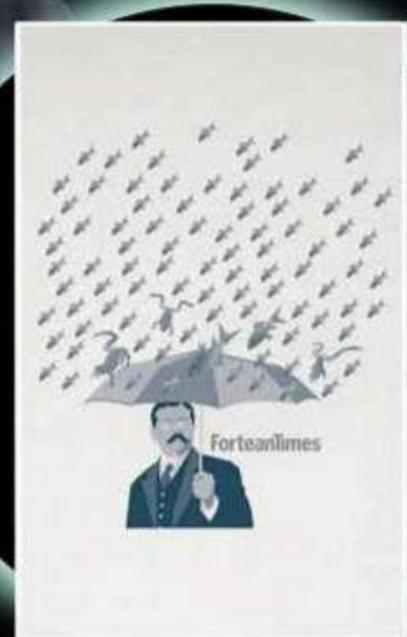
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Galactic panspermia

DAVID HAMBLING says that new discoveries point to a possible interstellar origin for life on Earth

In 1903 the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius suggested that life may not have originated on Earth but could have arrived here from space. Similar ideas had been proposed before, but Arrhenius was the first to develop a complete scientific theory of how organisms might be transported through space and survive to colonise new worlds. This theory, known as panspermia, hovers at the fringes of respectable science: not quite damned, but ignored, due to the overwhelming if unproven conviction that life started here.

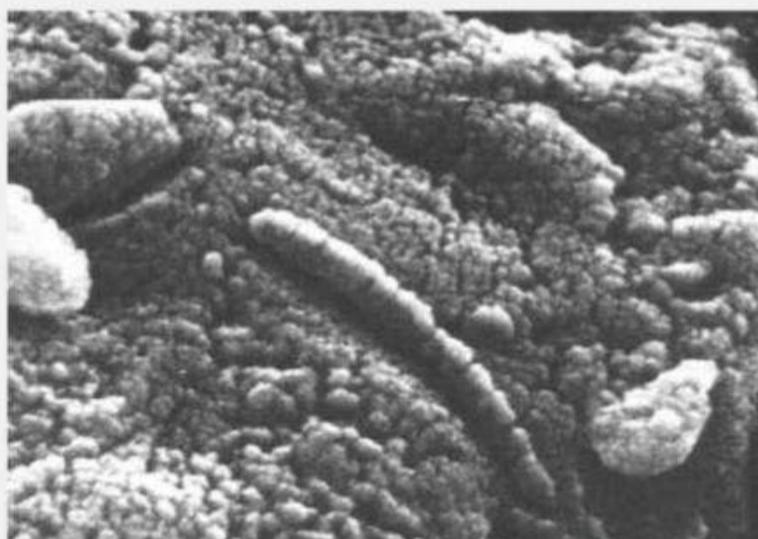
But as researchers struggle to explain how the unfavourable conditions on early Earth could produce life, panspermia is stealthily advancing.

Arrhenius thought that spacefaring spores could be driven by the pressure of starlight, like microscopic sails catching the wind. The smaller the particle, the faster it would go. This theory was sunk by the discovery that radiation levels in space would be lethal to unprotected organisms, just as hospitals sterilise equipment with ultraviolet light. Any space microbes would need to be inside a meteorite or other protective shielding.

This need for protection makes some recent claims for ET bacteria doubtful. In 2017, Russian cosmonaut Anton Shkaplerov told the TASS newspaper that bacteria found on the outside of the ISS might have originated in space. Cosmonauts had swabbed external surfaces of one ISS module, and Shkaplerov said they had found bacteria that were not present when the module was launched. The problem is that bacteria tend to get everywhere, and contamination is rife, even in space hardware. Unless the Russians have further evidence for an ET source, these bacteria are more than likely terrestrial.

Previously, work on panspermia focused on the possibility of transport within the Solar System, driven by exciting discoveries like meteorite ALH8401. Found in Antarctica in 1984, ALH8401 proved to be of Martian origin, and in 1996 analysis showed what appeared to be the fossils of tiny bacteria [FT92:5, 10]. These were smaller than any known terrestrial bacteria and indicated not only that there had once been life on Mars, but also that there might have been an exchange of life between Earth and the red planet.

However, the exact nature of the supposed bacterial fossils on ALH8401



LEFT: Martian meteorite ALH8401 was thought to harbour fossilised bacteria.

remains in doubt, as they seem too small to be living things. In 2004 a NASA team grew similar ‘fossils’ in the laboratory using magnetite crystals without any organic processes. The NASA report concluded – perhaps predictably – that the only way to be sure was to go to Mars and collect more fossils.

While it has some interesting possibilities, transport within the Solar System only gives a few dozen more possible starting places for life. Interstellar panspermia, however, would provide billions of possible points of origin. The arrival of a mysterious body called ‘Oumuamua in 2017 proved for the first time that objects can travel between the stars [FT363:13]. Astronomers have long believed that thousands of such objects pass the Solar System every day, but ‘Oumuamua was the first large enough to be tracked. It is cigar-shaped, perhaps 1,000m (3,300ft) long and 160m (525ft) across, big enough to hold a whole ecosystem.

‘Oumuamua inspired a team of researchers from the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics to look at panspermia on a grander scale, in a paper called “Galactic Panspermia” published in October 2018. Having previously shown how star systems at the heart of the Milky Way throw out a stream of objects, the team looked at the rate at which interstellar travellers like ‘Oumuamua would be captured by solar systems.

Each star system acts as a gravitational fishing net, capturing incoming objects. While some objects, like ‘Oumuamua, may be on trajectories that mean they skim by, many others are likely to be captured. The numbers are literally astronomical.

“We estimate that as many as 100 million such life-bearing objects may have travelled from one system to another,” says researcher Dr Ian Ginsberg.

The study concludes that living things and their components may be shuffled continuously across the Milky Way by this cosmic transit system, and even traded between galaxies, making galactic panspermia a genuine possibility.

The other key question is how easily life could survive the traumatic process of being blasted into space. Living things could become involuntary space travellers in two ways: a huge volcanic explosion, or a massive meteorite impact. Either event could throw debris out, moving fast enough to reach space, but the forces involved would obviously kill a human or any other non-microscopic being.

A 2014 study led by Dina Pasini at the University of Kent explored the ability of living things to survive extreme shocks. Pasini fired frozen pellets of algae into water at more than 6km (3.7 miles) a second, 10 times as fast as a handgun bullet. Higher speeds meant increased mortality rates, but some algae survived even the worst impacts. More surprisingly, tardigrades or ‘water bears’ also proved highly resilient to such shocks. These are small, common invertebrates found on every continent. Large numbers live in your garden and on your roof.

Tardigrades can survive vacuum, hard radiation and dehydration, and have previously been suggested as possible space travellers. A 2016 study by the University of Plovdiv suggested that even if a tardigrade did not itself survive, it would act as a capsule for a population of bacteria, algae and parasites.

The latest science suggests that there is a viable interstellar transport system and that rugged microscopic hitchhikers could survive the launch experience, then endure an extended journey in an encysted or dehydrated state.

We know also that life appeared on Earth almost four billion years ago, much earlier than scientists previously thought. There is no accepted theory of how this happened, given the conditions at the time. This raises the chances that life actually developed somewhere with more favourable chemistry and arrived here ready-made. Panspermia has yet to find general acceptance. But as the science accumulates, it may not be long before what was way-out science fiction becomes the conventional view.

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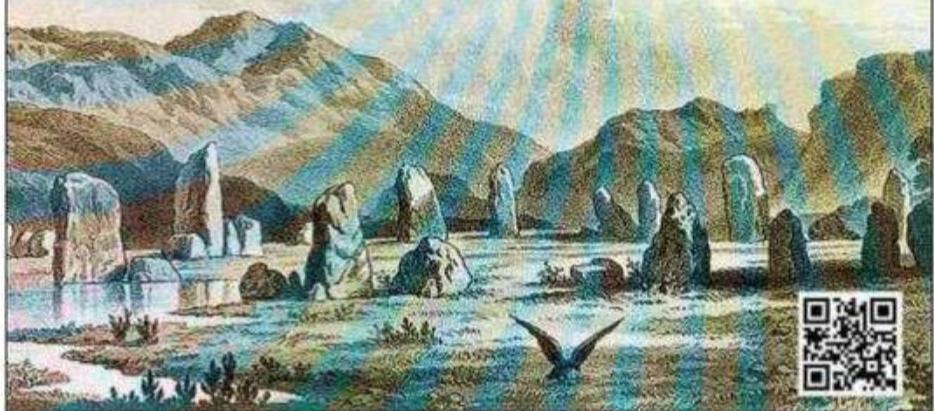
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CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

232: TOP GEAR

Greatest chariot battle at Kadesh (1274 BC, pictured at right), in which Rameses II – taking time out from siring 90 sons and 60 daughters – defeated the Hittites, involved c. 6,000 – sound like an anti-UBER Parisian taxi-drivers demo. 25 per cent of named Hittite fatalities were drivers; cf. Alan Gardiner, *The Kadesh Inscriptions of Rameses II*, vol2 (1975).

Most notable of the 30 OT mentions is that (2 Kings 2. 11) of Elijah's fiery vehicle to heaven – St Peter not yet there to check its MOT. "He'd shoot up to heaven, leaving such an incandescent train that in one age he would be said to have gone aloft in a fiery chariot" – Fort, Books, p77.

In the *Iliad* massed chariot charges are a thing of the past, tediously remembered by old Nestor. It does, however, include the earliest chariot race (bk23 vv362-447), in which the gods interfere to help their favourites, the drivers harass the ref and dispute who won, as the crowd boos and hisses – sound familiar?

Scythed chariots were mainly Persian. Despite occasional successes (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, bk4 ch1 paras 17-9; Appian, *Wars*, bk12 ch3 para18), they were usually a clap-out, being countered both by Alexander and the Romans with caltrops or lines of stakes.

Though recommended by an anonymous late inventor (*De Rebus Bellicis*, chs12-4), the Romans never used them. After the Battle of Zela (47 BC), only mention is the *Augustan History*'s claim (ch55 para2) that emperor Alexander Severus captured 1,800.

Last and most dramatic Roman chariot engagement was that between Agricola and the Caledonians (Mons Graupius, Scotland, AD 84). Twenty years earlier (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk14 chs34-6), they had faced Boudicca (aka Boadicea), who led her forces with daughters in a chariot from which she addressed her troops – can imagine Mrs Thatcher doing this.

64,000-denarius question: did the Britons use scythed chariots? Their presence on Boudicca's London statue is generally deemed un-historical, since they are mentioned neither by Cæsar nor Tacitus. But, Pomponius Mela (*Geography*, bk. ch43 – 1st-century AD) says they did, as do poets Lucian, Martial, and Silius Italicus. Lack of archaeological evidence might be the



clincher – but this could always change.

When used, they caused hideous mangling: gruesome descriptions in Appian (*loc. cit.*) and Lucretius (bk3 vv634-56), making the mayhem caused by Bond's Aston Martin's scythed wheels (*Goldfinger*) seem tame, certainly less so than the female charioteer sliced and diced in *Gladiator* – not something to Crowe over...

Petronius (*Satyricon*, ch45) mentions a female chariot-fighter (*essedaria*). Editor Gareth Scheming (2011, p185) thinks she was inspired by Roman imagination being tickled "by the remarkable feats of British women charioteers."

INTERLUDE: Did Romans buy things fallen from the back of a chariot? Horace's line (*Epistles*, bk1 no7 v65) "Selling trashy stuff to the tunic-clad rabble" suggests a toga-ed Del Boy. Commuter chariot jams? Julius Cæsar banned wheeled vehicles from Rome dawn to dusk, with some exceptions – his version of the Congestion Charge. Cicero describes a hitman who drove all night to inform his boss of the kill (*Pro Roscio Amerino*, ch34 para98). Dio Cassius, Suetonius, Tacitus all say Vitellius (fattest emperor) limped from a boyhood

chariot accident. Nero's father Domitius deliberately ran down and killed a child on the Appian Way.

Injuries would be common if many drove like the young tearaway in Juvenal (*Satires* 1 vv60-62) who did a ton to impress his girlfriend – some interpret his companion as a boy in drag: scope here for Jeremy Clarkson. The other 64,000-denarius question: which side did the Romans drive? Based on ruts discovered (1998) in a Swindon quarry, many have swung left, though some visitors to Pompeii suspect it was down the middle. Napoleon popularised right-side driving – *Droit de Seigneur*. The idea that standard 4' 8 1/2" gauges are Roman-inspired is dismissed as urban legend on scopes.com).

Greek chariot racing began 680 BC. Pindar, the first sport's commentator ("Full of wind and water" – Ezra Pound, though no Coleman-Balls) wrote 14 Odes on winning drivers and sponsors (usually Sicilian royalty, not American or Arab owners). But, not one to Spartan Princess Cynisca ('female puppy') who twice (396, 392 BC) entered and won, uniquely for a woman. Not that she drove them, any more than does Mrs Windsor ride at Ascot or Epsom. Indeed, women being banned from attending, she didn't even see her victories.

Many spectacular crashes, above all the 462 BC Pythian Games one, won by King Archelaus, the only one of 42 to finish; cf. the 1967 Grand National's 'Foinavan Shambles'. Pindar (*Pythian Odes* 4 & 5) glides tactfully over this.

Can't be sure (date uncertain), but this may have inspired Sophocles's set-piece (*Electra*, vv680-763) describing Orestes's gory death – actually fabricated to trick his mother – in a massive collision.

Little remains of Rome's Circus Maximus or Constantinople's Hippodrome (cf. John Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 1986; Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 1976). Pliny (*Natural History*, k36 ch25 para102) says the former accommodated 250,000 fans. A 4th-century AD Gazetteer claims 385,000. Hippodrome estimates vary between 60,000 -100,000.

Circus certainly seated more than the Colosseum – may we infer fewer Romans attended 'Death in the Afternoon'? Juvenal's 'Bread and Circuses' – not Arenas – points the same way. He also (*Satire* 11) denounces Roman passion for



ARCHÆOLOGY

FT'S REGULAR EXCAVATION OF ODDITIES AND ANTIQUITIES

the races. So does Pliny, both on sending carrier-pigeons painted in winning colours to announce results and the fan who barbecued himself on the pyre of his favourite driver (bk7 ch53 para186; bk10 ch34 para71).

Blues and Greens were the top colours, Reds and Whites very Second Division. Rabid Green fan Caligula poisoned rival coloured drivers and horses. He also had cudgelled Romans who camped out at night (shades of Royal Wedding nutters) to get the free tickets – another possible pointer to greater Circus popularity.

Nero attempted to drive a 10-horse chariot at Olympia. Fell out twice, came last, won the prize from tactful judges – “Only the Greeks appreciate my Genius!” For variation, he used camels, outdone by Elagabalus who used bulls, elephants, lions, tigers, plus naked girls for wheelbarrow races.

Gravestone epitaphs fix average charioteer lifespan at 22 years. Spectacular exceptions include Roman Diocles who won 1,462 races, total prize-money 35 million sesterces – ‘the best-paid athlete of all time’ (Peter Struck, *Lapham's Quarterly*, 2 Aug 2010). Byzantium’s top performer was Porphyrius (cf. Alan Cameron’s 1973 biography) who uniquely won the *Diversum* in one day – racing for Greens v. Blues, then vice versa.

Surprisingly few Roman racing riots. Their outlet was imploring demons to demolish drivers in toxic language suitable to their lead ‘Curse Tablets’ (*Defixiones*) – make EPL terrace chants seem tame. By contrast, rabid Byzantine fans, sporting their ‘Hunnic’ hairstyles and clothes designed to hide puny physiques (early Teddy Boys) ran riot in all major cities. The Nika (Victory) Revolt (AD 532), uniting Blues and Greens, as unlikely bedfellows as Rangers and Celtic fans, saw half Constantinople burnt, 30,000 killed, Justinian almost dethroned.

Talking of the ‘Old Firm’, Blues and Greens were long thought divided by religion and class. Despite Cameron’s demolition of most of this, there are scraps of evidence in favour (BB, *Byzantine* 48, 1978, 275-6).

Persian King Chosroes deliberately slowed down the Blues to ensure Green victory, to spite Blue fan emperor Justinian (Procopius, *Wars*, bk2 ch11 para32). But all good things must end. Last Roman race was staged by Gothic king Totila (AD 559) “To see what they were like.” By the 11th-12th centuries, racing at Constantinople was replaced by jousting and polo. The Hippodrome never recovered from the 1204 sack, post-1453 conquering Turks had no interest, the factional fans had metamorphosed from murderous chanting fans to emperor-organised massed-choir hymn singing: clearly, they had – Information Leek here – become Welsh.

FEMALE CERAMICIST

Pottery-making in ancient Greece was a male-dominated profession, but one woman from Crete broke the mould to become the only known female master ceramicist in antiquity. She lived to be about 45 or 50 and was buried in Eleutherna on the slopes of Mount Ida, the legendary birthplace of Zeus. Ornate pottery in nearby graves suggests she lived between 900 and 650 BC, after the fall of the Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations and toward the end of the Greek Dark Age. On closer examination of her bones, archæologists noticed some intriguing details: compared with other women at the Orthi Petra burial site, she was unusually muscular, especially on the right side of her body. She had also worn out the cartilage in her knee and hip joints, which would have made moving a painful, bone-scraping affair.

Curious as to what repetitive, lifelong motions would have led to that kind of wear, the researchers analysed the biomechanics behind the different professions of ancient women, pantomiming the motions with a human skeletal model and observing which muscles were involved. They tried clothes-washing, bread-baking, harvesting, and loom-weaving – nothing panned out. Expanding their search beyond traditional female roles, they tried throwing pottery. A local female potter agreed to model for the scientists. Analysing her muscles as she worked, they were convinced that her profession was a match for their ancient artisan. Constantly flexing her leg to turn the kick wheel would have worn out her joints; repeatedly leaning to one side of the spinning clay to shape and sculpt it would have developed the muscles on that side of her body. Her lifetime devotion to the craft likely meant she was a master, the researchers said, blazing a trail for female ceramicists that continues on the island today. [sciencemag.org](https://www.sciencemag.org), 7 Sept 2018.

A MAYAN GAME OF THRONES

A carved Mayan limestone altar slab (picture below) weighing about a ton has been found at the La Corona archæological site in Guatemala. It measures 1.46m by 1.2m (4.8x3.9ft) and contains a hieroglyphic Mayan inscription corresponding to 12 May 544. The carving depicts King Chak Took Ich'aak, then La Corona's ruler, seated and holding a sceptre. Other finds have enabled researchers to deduce that this king also governed the nearby city of El Peru-Waka some 20 years later.

Tomas Barrientos, co-director of excavations at the site, commented: “This altar shows us a part of Guatemala’s history and in this case, around 1,500 years ago, I would call this the historical Mayan version of *Game of Thrones*”, referring to details showing that the Kaanul dynasty, or Serpent Kingdom, developed a political movement in La Corona that allowed them to defeat their Tikal arch-rivals in 562. The movement had gone on to form alliances with small cities surrounding Tikal ahead of the final victory push. Alongside those revelations, researchers also found details of a wedding between a princess from the Serpent Kingdom and a king of La Corona. Barrientos said the altar “pieces together the puzzle” of the Mayan culture’s political relationships. But one probably needs the whole box set to fully understand all these shenanigans. *PhysOrg*, 14 Sept 2018.



JOHAN ORDONEZ / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



A fine and private place?

ALAN MURDIE is unconvinced by a recent poll and disturbed by the destruction of a burial ground

SEEING GHOSTS

If there was one seasonal surprise for me during autumn 2018 it was in the announcement of a poll revealing three in five adults – 60 per cent – report seeing a ghost during their lifetime. Commissioned by e-marketplace company Groupon from Chicago, the finding emerged from a survey of 2,000 people living in the United States. One in three respondents believed that they had either stayed in a haunted house or were actually living in one now, whilst 40 per cent thought their pet had seen a ghost too.

Personally, I find such levels of contemporary ghost sightings rather on the high side – excessively so. There is no doubt some people experience apparitions (I saw one myself in 2011) and that substantial numbers of adults believe they have undergone a psychic experience of some kind. But if the question asked had been “Have you ever experienced an hallucination?” the result would seem altogether more plausible.

Such a high figure is certainly in marked contrast with previous surveys from the UK suggesting seeing a ghost is not common. In the mid-1950s it was claimed that one in six people in England believed in ghosts and one in 14 had seen one (*Supernature*, 1973, Lyall Watson). Furthermore, as I have commented before, in recent generations apparitional sightings have waned. Of course, the true figure may well be far higher than is recognised. As with crime, many more ghost experiences occur than ever get recorded. But a situation where 60 per cent of the population have seen a ghost is truly remarkable, well beyond previous claimed or expected levels of psychic experiences obtained hitherto.

Of course, to quote philosopher and one-time collaborator with ghost hunter Harry Price, Dr CEM Joad (1894-1956): “It all depends what one means” by a ‘ghost’. The demographics of any sample, the actual questions posed and the subsequent treatment of data may all influence results.

The early Society for Psychical Research undertook extensive surveys and had no difficulty in gathering material in the hope a case-collection approach might make theoretical sense of manifestations. The classic study *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) and their major survey of hallucinatory experiences, the *Census of Hallucinations* conducted in 1894, remain the largest surveys yet undertaken. Some 17,000 people were sent questionnaires,



ABOVE: The Shelley Theatre in Bournemouth, scene of a phantom dog sighting among other things.

In the 1950s it was claimed that one in six people in England believed in ghosts

with in-depth analysis of responses supporting the idea of crisis type apparitions appearing at the moment of death. (H Sidgwick, A Johnson, FWH Myers, F Podmore, E Sidgwick (1894) ‘Report on the Census of Hallucinations’. *Proceedings of the SPR; Apparitions*, 1942, by GNM Tyrrell).

Appeals to readers or viewers in the media for ghost experiences often receive floods of material; relatively few respondents give accounts of undergoing experiences for which a normal explanation was ultimately forthcoming. Newspaper cutting agencies may be utilised for gathering reports of apparitions and poltergeists, an approach endorsed by a number of dedicated individual ghost researchers whom I have been fortunate to know, including Dennis Bardens, Tom Perrott and Andrew Green. Such *causes célèbres* as the Borley and Enfield cases both emerged from coverage in the press (in the *Daily Mirror*, 48 years apart), although others have rejected this method (e.g. Peter Underwood in *The Ghost Hunter’s Guide*, 1984). Clipping services

have also been used by organisations interested in pattern analysis, most notably the collections obtained by the Parapsychological Laboratory at Downtown, Wiltshire, between 1967-1974. Their results and annual statistical analysis were published in *Journal of Paraphysics* in a “Spontaneous Directory” over successive years (compiled by Manfred Cassirer et al, 1967-1974) dividing cases geographically and scrutinising reports of phenomena with reference to 23 categories covering experiential (i.e. sense-affected), contextual and environmental factors (e.g. classes of property, presence of children and teenagers).

I was involved in a smaller-scale UK survey of this nature in 2007, generously funded by Dr Barrie Colvin. After lengthy discussion of the search words to be applied by the cuttings agency, the resultant yield after six months of scanning the UK press was distilled down to 106 reports of phenomena. Of these, 47 reports involved a human apparition, representing 44 per cent of the total. The standard of corroboration was not good, but this was a close match for the finding that 47 per cent of cases of hauntings appearing in UK newspapers in 1967-71 involved human apparitions (*Journal of Paraphysics*, 1971).

Seeing a ghost or apparition relates to specifically visual experience but even then, there is no guarantee that respondents understand and answer a question

accurately. One problem is the reporting of non-visual incidents as ‘sightings’, noted concerning apparitional reports over a century ago by Sir Oliver Lodge who observed “many of such cases – even when reported – resolve themselves merely into uncanny noises such as may be accounted for in one of a great many different ways” (*Apparitions Considered in Light of Telepathy* in *The Survival of Man*, 1909, chapter 7).

This continues today. For example, a woman in Ireland who heard a Banshee for three hours the night before the death of her mother didn’t actually see anything, but made no distinction between visual and auditory experience; it was her father who witnessed it and the rest of her family had a history of ghost sightings. (Patricia Lysaght, *The Banshee*, 1986, also cited in *Belief in Ghosts in Post War England*, 2011, doctoral thesis by Dr Paul Cowdell, Univ. of Hertfordshire). An example in 2018: the multiple incidents at the Shelley Theatre in Bournemouth appeared under the heading ‘Six spooky sightings’, but when scrutinised in detail only two turn out to involve two visual apparitions (*Bournemouth Daily Echo*, 27 July 2018 – see below). And what of sensing someone behind you, looking round and seeing no one, but being left with an impression there is someone there, described by Anthony Hippesley Coxe in *Haunted Britain* (1973)?

Concerning the Groupon survey, this was conducted in late August 2018 by the OnePoll market research company. Never aiming at being a scientific survey, it seems to have been conceived and executed as a marketing exercise, with replies received from a sample who were canvassed on their “favourite spooky fall holiday” and their strongest personal fears. Results were then interpreted by the company, which already successfully markets Hallowe’en events, “fall-related attractions” and activities involving a thrill or “scare” factor like trips to haunted places. Brian Fields, Vice-President of Groupon, stated: “One of the biggest ways that people like to scare themselves during the month of October is by visiting a haunted house” and “It takes less than five seconds for someone to become frightened in a haunted house”. Listed as the “top 10 fears” identified were: “snakes, spiders, sharks, drowning, heights, public speaking, failure, bees, cramped spaces and rejection.”

Accordingly, I suspect the Groupon statistics are skewed by a range of selection biases, but I am sure this will not prevent the claim that “60 per cent of people have seen a ghost” from being solemnly cited as a meaningful figure in the future. (*Independent*, 12 Oct 2018 and many others).

HAUNTED HS2?

*O passenger, pray list and catch
Our sighs and piteous groans,
Half stifled in this jumbled patch
Of wrench'd memorial stones!*

“*The Levelled Churchyard*” is an early poem by Thomas Hardy, envisaging spirits of persons disinterred from a graveyard to make way for a railway development returning to haunt. Hardy wrote his poem after working as an apprentice architect in London in the 1860s, during the building of the Midland Railway line at King’s Cross and St Pancras. Unfortunately, the route selected crossed the chaotic burial ground of Old St Pancras churchyard. Rather than bypass it, builders simply ploughed straight through, exhuming the jumbled coffins. The task fell to Hardy to arrange and organise the relocation of memorials. He chose to place the tombstones and remains beneath a nearby ash tree. (“Do you remember,” said Hardy’s friend, “how we found the man with two heads at St Pancras?”).

Now history is repeating itself with a mass exhumation for the modern HS2 railway project, expanding Euston station to serve as its London terminus. An estimated 30,000-60,000 graves will need to be removed from St James’s Gardens, between Cardington Street and Hampstead Road, the area having been used as a burial ground for the parish of St James Piccadilly between 1790 and 1853. Conceivably, some people living today may have their great-grandparents interred here. The majority of the monuments and tombstones were removed in 1887 when the area was opened as a public garden. Developer HS2 has been working with Historic England, the Church of England and the local parish to “put appropriate plans in place for

reburial”. Over the next two years, more than 1,000 archaeologists, scientists and conservationists are expected to explore this and at least 60 archaeological sites along the 150-mile (240km) route up to Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. Developers say that “all artefacts and human remains will be treated with due dignity, care and respect.” Meanwhile the St James site has already disappeared from google mapping.

Like many charged with executing a controversial policy, Helen Wass the Head of Heritage at HS2 Ltd has endeavoured to stave off criticism by the use of inflated and elaborate phraseology, impressing journalists with “the sheer scale of what is being done” of how “so many people are helping us tell the story,” in a way characteristic of the gloss and hyperbole so often deployed with such contentious developments. Additionally, she claims, “It’s the story of a nation” and indeed it is, if the story is one of yet again foisting largely unwanted developments against the wishes of many in the community, digging up the dead and obliterating sacred sites and local heritage. (*Guardian*, 26 Oct 2018 BBC website; *Rail Staff* <https://www.railstaff.uk/2018/10/30/archaeologists-begin-work-on-hs2/> 30 Oct 2018)

An instinctive repugnance still remains over disturbing the mortal remains of our ancestors, the continuing feeling of many being that a final resting place ought to be just that (they often paid for those graves, after all!). Many locals are opposed to the destruction of St James’s Gardens and protests and concerns have been raised by sections of the Anglican Church. Last year a service was held to “pray for living as well as dead” around Euston station, where residents face years of disruption. Among



ABOVE: The ‘Hardy Tree’ in Old St Pancras churchyard, where the writer relocated tombstones disturbed by the building of the Midland Railway into nearby King’s Cross and St Pancras stations.



GHOSTWATCH



ADRIAN DENNIS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

those buried there are explorer Captain Matthew Flinders and Lord George Gordon (1751-1793). Gordon was a convert to Judaism and it will be interesting to see if this provokes protests on religious grounds from practicing Jews today. The HS2 route will also pass through a 12th-century graveyard in Stoke Mandeville, Buckingham, and consecrated ground near Birmingham will also be affected. If this were the United States, Native Americans would never tolerate such an action or threat to their burial sites.

Personally speaking, I have a sense of foreboding about the whole enterprise with the St James site having the greatest potential for triggering modern folklore involving bad luck and aggrieved ghosts. Trains, railway stations and tunnels seemingly attract folklore in a way that buses, bus depots and routes do not. A precedent exists in ghostly literature, as shown by tales concerning Watford Rail tunnel, not far away. The story goes that when the Watford tunnel was constructed in the 19th century for the London Birmingham Railway Company, the contracted builders found it necessary to bore through part of a churchyard. Many times, coffins were exposed and human remains showered on to the workers below.

Subsequently, when steam trains began entering the tunnel and afterwards the line came to be used by trains belonging to the London and North West Railway Company, it was realised there was a problem. Every time drivers fired their boilers, which was necessary at a certain point in the tunnel, there would be a vicious 'blow-back' and several drivers were badly burnt by the flames. On investigation, this effect was found always to occur when the engine was below the graveyard and the drivers associated this with the ghosts of the dead protesting at the "invasion of their privacy".

This story appeared in *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973) by Andrew Green, and for once I consider it marked an uncharacteristic fall from the author's usually strict standards for including only the more credible ghost reports. The often gothic construction styles of particular locations, exemplified in the funereal architecture fashionable in the 19th century with cemeteries, seems to stimulate belief. A recent historical study, *Early British Railway Tunnels: The Implications for planners, landowners and passengers 1830-1870* (2016) by Dr Hubert John Pagnell asks: "Was this due to a fear of being sucked in, rather like gazing into the darkness of a seemingly impenetrable tunnel, like a near-death experience? To some people the process or experience of death is like being sucked through an endless tunnel".

HAUNTED THEATRES

Details of another threat to a particular piece of local heritage with haunted associations appeared in the *Salford Star*, 19 September 2018, under the headline "Salford Victoria Theatre Trust in race to stop auction of Grade II listed building". The former Victoria Theatre in Salford has a sad history of decline spanning half a century and now is reportedly at risk of complete demolition, despite being awarded listed building status as long ago as 1980.

Back in February 1972, when the theatre closed its doors to be converted into a bingo hall, the *Manchester Evening News* reported the building as being long haunted by a female apparition. The ghost had been seen to "come through the bar through one wall and disappear through another". Doors also opened inexplicably.

This first attempt at running it as a bingo emporium failed in 1973, and the building shut again. Remaining dark, empty and

LEFT: A skeleton unearthed during the digging up of the burial ground under St James's Gardens to make way for HS2.

reputedly haunted for years, a second effort was made at hosting bingo in it during the 1980s. This thrived until 2008. During this second period, over 30 years ago, the original structure of the building was severely damaged when its third floor was removed and replaced with less ornate brickwork, adjoining the former Irwell Castle Hotel. Separated by only a narrow wall from the theatre, the hotel was also troubled by the phantom head and shoulders of a figure seen "coming into the building through a back wall". (*Manchester Evening News*, 25 Feb 1972).

Fortunately, many other theatres still flourish. Along with pubs, if there is one category of building that can be relied upon to generate reports of ghosts and hauntings each year, it is these. Year in, year out, theatres around the country report the presence of ghosts; almost every one, antique or modern, seems to enjoy a tradition for being haunted at some stage. This is not surprising as theatre, more palpably than any of the other arts, presents and recreates the past. Theatrical reproductions of real stories involve two time periods co-existing, the play presenting the past in the present to an audience. With every performance, what once happened is re-enacted, charged with both the emotions of the actors and the audience watching.

Naturally, I was delighted to learn of a new haunted theatre, the Shelley at Bournemouth (see above), not far from where I live. Bar manager Tom Dunne reports an eerie feeling of being watched. Tom also tells of an occasion when he was in the theatre kitchen another person in the bar saw a large dog "like an Irish wolfhound" walking towards the exit. "I can guarantee there were no dogs in the building". Rodger Allan of the volunteer team described how he and a colleague heard unexplained footsteps behind the stage curtain, one night when checking the otherwise empty theatre after a performance. Bizarrely, Rodger had also heard a "loud wheezing cough" in the bar area "only inches from my head" along with another volunteer. On another occasion a local painter and decorator was driven out by an oppressive atmosphere in the upper part of the room. Zoe Dunne, manager of the Shelley Theatre, has witnessed "a girl walk down the staircase from the medical centre into the under-stairs cupboard" and wonders that since the theatre used to be a school if this is "a 'hello' from the past?" A theatre spokesman states: "All the sightings have a sense of playfulness about them. The mischief making has been here for years!". And long may it continue!

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STRANGE DAYS

STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN and THEO PAIJMANS round up the
weirdest news items from across Europe...

WHAT A TANGLED WEB

Giant spider webs up to 300m (984ft) long appeared on the shores of the Gulf of Patras at Aitoliko, western Greece, making the landscape look as if it were covered with snow. The responsible species, *Tetragnatha*, was apparently in an amorous mood. "The spiders are having a party", University of Thracia biologist Maria Chatzaki explained. "They are mating and reproducing." *Die Rheinpfalz*, 25 Sept 2018.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

A burglar broke into an amusement arcade in Cologne on 6 April 2018 intending to prise open the slot machines and steal the money. After some time, he noticed CCTV cameras and decided to blind them by sticking adhesive tape over the lenses. However, as the camera was storing the footage, he instead provided police with a perfect close-up portrait. *FOCUS Online*, 12 Sept 2018.

In September 2018, a 17-year-old drunk broke into a Turkish kebab shop in Kassel, Germany, and started to prepare himself a bite as he was hungry. This was observed by passers-by and, as the police report pointedly says, "the burglar was arrested before he could satisfy his hunger." *svz.de*, 11 Sept 2018.

Police in the Dutch city of Hengelo caught a thief of women's underwear red-handed with the help of a 'bait-bra'. Complaints of stolen lingerie had been made to the police in August and surveillance cameras filmed the culprit in the act a month later, but unfortunately the thief was unrecognisable. The police placed a tiny transmitter in a brassiere, which then was hung on a clothesline as bait. The thief struck again, and this time could be traced and apprehended. At his home, other women's underwear was found. As far as we know, this is



GIANNIS GIANNAKOPoulos / FACEBOOK

ABOVE: The giant spider webs covering the Greek town of Aitoliko on the Gulf of Patras in western Greece.

the first time Dutch police have employed the help of a 'bait-bra'. *RTVoost.nl*, 2 Nov; *Algemeen Dagblad*, 2 Nov 2018.

STONE-THROWING POLT

In Sohatu (pop 3,478), a commune in Calarasi County, Romania, a poltergeist is throwing stones at people. The local newspaper declares that locals are suffering at the "the whims of evil night spirits, of terrible spirits of terrible men!" Starting at the end of July, each night at 11 o'clock, 10 to 15 villagers assembled to witness the stone-throwing, which goes on until 4am. "We move around and look at where the stones come from, but find nothing. We all stay until three in the morning, but we can't catch anyone. The rocks are just thrown. There are several houses which are bombarded. Last night there were two cops with us, and still they were the target of stones. They do not hurt us. The rocks only hit the houses." The stone-throwing continued despite the presence of police armed with guns and flashlights. The officers were

themselves bombarded, but could find no evidence of foul play. The villagers demanded the mayor take action, yet even an exorcism by the local priest failed to remove the ghosts, and reports of strange happenings continue. *Evenimentul Zilei*, 7 Aug 2018.

MYSTERIOUS DIE-OFFS

Residents of The Hague and local wildlife experts are baffled by the sudden deaths of hundreds of starlings in one area, the Huijgenspark, that began in mid-October last year and the cause of which remains a mystery. Over a period of two weeks in October the animal ambulance found almost 300 dead starlings in the park. On 19 October, 30 birds were found. A week later, another 30 were retrieved from the area. Then 88 starlings died in one night, and on 1 November the ambulance collected as many as 150 dead starlings from the park. At first the birds were found only under the trees in the park, but later were also seen in the parking lot. Understandably, the neighbourhood was in turmoil

and speculation ranged from poisonings to secret testing of a 5-G network. "But we have to separate the rumours from the facts," local resident Isabel Elena Tirado told a reporter. The city council asked the Dutch Authority for Food and Consumer Safety (NVWA) to investigate the deaths. The NVWA in turn asked a number of laboratories for their help, but preliminary autopsies conducted by a specialised lab and tests run by a bird shelter could find no definitive cause for the sudden mass deaths. Said Sharon Lexmond of bird shelter De Wulp: "The first starlings that we received were well fed and in fact very healthy. There also was no internal damage. That makes it such a rare case." *Algemeen Dagblad*, 2 Nov 2018.

Meanwhile, in the German region of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and in parts of Rügen, Börgerende and Heiligendamm, sea buckthorn shrubs continued to wither away and die in droves. "We must tackle this problem with renewed vigour," said



agricultural minister Till Backhaus in June 2018. The first dead shrubs were noticed in 2015, but the cause of their demise is still unclear according to the minister. Experts from the plant protection services suspect fungal infestation, but Backhaus did not want to exclude climatological factors. *Proplanta.de*, 26 June 2018.

ON THE PROWL

On Sunday 10 June 2018, Michelle Altieri was walking her dog Bella when she saw a "panther" near Schongau in Bavaria, just 200m (656ft) away. She described the animal as "black and larger than any Alsatian. The cat moved elegantly, and had a long tail which became ever curlier at the end." The animal walked slowly toward a barn where it lay down to escape the heat. The witness quickly informed police, who found a large black, partially shaven Newfoundland dog. *tz*, 12 June 2018.

Similarly, on 10 September in Offenbach, Germany, a man called police to report a very large, possibly dangerous attack dog lurking almost motionless in front of a gym. The cops arrived and, as their report explained, "subdued an extravagantly large soft toy panther". *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 Sept 2018.

Less easily resolved was a series of ABC sightings over the summer, when people around

Casnate, northern Italy, were in fear of a puma that was repeatedly seen in the area around Lake Como. The first report was of a "bloodbath among the chickens" at Cantù. The animal was sought and a photo trap picture "of a fox or puma" taken on 10 July. Karl Shuker gave us his opinion of the photo, suggesting it was "certainly reminiscent of a somewhat thin fox; its body proportions do not appear puma-like at all in my eyes, and it seems to lack the characteristic black vertical face bar that pumas have."

Nevertheless, further eyewitness reports seemed to confirm the presence of a big cat. A family with an eight-year-old daughter observed a puma between Casnate and Senna. Then, two guard dogs were wounded and had to be treated by a vet; their injuries were blamed on the puma. Locals in Casnate were warned not to walk in nearby forests. A local forestry worker claimed to have seen the animal, and paw prints were later found. Sightings continued to be reported in the area and children were afraid to play outdoors. On 13 August, the puma was spotted near Casnate con Bernate. Although the animal was hunted by police with food, lures, and photo traps, it evaded capture, despite a growing number of witnesses claiming to have seen it. A week later, Alberto Martinelli took his usual stroll through the woods of Navedano

di Senna, near Casnate, and came across a badly torn pheasant's carcass. "It still had a wing and the whole tail, but no longer a head. I have never seen anything like this." A day later, something had removed the remains. He suspected the puma. On 27 August, a motorist spotted the cat at Asnago. "It was the puma, definitely – with a white tip on its 80cm [31in] tail and moving rapidly," Roberto Riva told the papers. As it was the beginning of the hunting season, Giuseppe Zanotti, provincial president of the Italian Hunting Federation, Federcaccia, advised hunters to shoot the puma on sight and to be careful with their dogs. On 21 September, around midnight, 20-year-old Maurizio Introzzi of Fino Mornasco, saw the animal in his headlights in the yard outside his home. "I think the animal is very hungry. It is so thin. When I caught it with my headlights, it disappeared – I think it jumped over the courtyard fence. I hope they catch it – it's not a very nice thing to find in the yard when you come home!" Two days later, a pensioner saw the puma at Casnate con Bernate: "It looked like a large yellow dog, exactly like in the photo published in the *Provincia*, and was attacking a cat." Sightings continue to be reported in the area. *Provincia di Como*, 16+18+26 July; 8+9+10+11+12+13+15+16+25+31 Aug; 9+23+25 Sept 2018.

COMO'S VANISHING CATS

While the puma was on the prowl, domestic cats were disappearing near Lake Como, Italy. In mid-September, cats began to vanish into thin air in the neighbourhood of Via Bellini in Olgiate. On Facebook, Professor Viliam De Bernardinis explained that "about a dozen cats" owned by his family had disappeared under suspicious circumstances. "In addition to our cats, we fed another 11 cats and they all disappeared this summer." In the Baragiola area of Olgiate the owner of a black cat reported its disappearance. Then, in early September, more than a dozen cats – most of them black – disappeared in Olgiate. Cat thieves were suspected, although one cat was later found dead. Witnesses said dark figures, equipped with torches, had been seen searching gardens for felines. Said lawyer Maria Cristina Ferrari: "We had adopted them, and they were well looked after. When I left home on 20 August, the cats were there, then I went on vacation and when I returned, around 3 September, they were all gone. Someone took them when everyone in the neighbourhood was on vacation, except for a pensioner who fed them." The newspaper reports that the disappearance of well cared for cats was a recent but now widespread phenomenon in Italy. *Provincia di Como*, 23+26 Sept 2018.



ABOVE LEFT: One of the hundreds of dead starlings found in a park in The Hague. ABOVE RIGHT: The animal photographed on 10 July 2018: is it a puma or a fox?



MATTEO GORIA



STRANGE DAYS

VAMPIRE NEWS

Dracula coins it in Ireland, 'vampire burials' unearthed in Italy and beyond, and the Russian werewolf-slayer who stabbed her boyfriend



CENTRAL BANK OF IRELAND

DRACULA'S COIN

Just in time for Hallowe'en, Ireland's Central Bank launched this 15 Euro Bram Stoker Dracula silver proof coin, designed by David Rooney. It commemorates the life of the Dublin-born author and his famous novel *Dracula*, published in 1897. Stoker is said to have acquired some of his ideas about vampires from the Scottish-born writer Emily Gerard, and particularly her essay on "Transylvanian Superstitions". She it was, for example, who mentioned that in Romanian tradition the undead could be killed only by driving stakes through their hearts or, in extreme cases, cutting off their heads and stuffing garlic in their mouths. To date, more than 1,000 novels and 200 films have been made about the famous Count, making him the most portrayed literary character in history. The coin, limited to a mintage of 3,000, was on sale from 26 October for 60 Euros. It can be purchased at collectorcoins.ie. *irishtimes.com*, 26 Oct 2018.

in Teverina, Italy, provides evidence of ancient "vampire burials". A stone was placed in the mouth as part of a funeral ritual designed to prevent the child (gender undetermined) from rising and spreading disease. An abscessed tooth, which can be a side effect of

A stone was placed in the mouth as part of a funeral ritual

malaria, provided evidence that the child had been killed in the epidemic that struck so many of the cemetery's inhabitants. The find – known locally as the 'Vampire of Lugnano' – was unearthed at

La Necropoli dei Bambini, (Cemetery of Children), a burial site dating back to a malaria outbreak in AD 400 that killed many babies and small children. It was one of five new burials discovered there over the summer, and was found placed underneath a makeshift tomb constructed from roof tiles. The child's open jaws and tooth marks on the surface of the stone were evidence that it had been placed in the mouth intentionally.

- Previous excavations at the Teverina site have revealed the bones of infants and toddlers alongside objects associated with witchcraft and magic, including raven talons, toad bones, bronze cauldrons filled with ash and the remains of



DAVID PICKEL / STANFORD UNIVERSITY

VAMPIRE BURIALS

The discovery of a 10-year-old child's body at a Roman site

TOP: Ireland's Central Bank launched its limited edition Dracula coin to celebrate the famous creation of Dublin-born Bram Stoker. ABOVE: The 'Vampire of Lugnano', the body of a 10-year-old child with a stone placed in its mouth, found in Teverina, Italy.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

puppies that appear to have been sacrificed. The body of a three-year-old girl had stones weighing down her hands and feet – a practice also thought to prevent corpses from returning to life. With much of the cemetery still unexplored, the archaeologists intend to return to the site next summer.

Rocks have previously been found in the mouths of the dead – for example in two 18th century skeletons in Co. Roscommon, Ireland [FT283:18] and one found in a 1576 plague pit near Venice [FT249:18]. This might be explained by the fact that in some regions, vampires were known as “shroud-eaters”, because – on disinterment – the cloth covering the corpse’s face appeared to have been eaten away, revealing the teeth. In fact, the bacteria in the mouth had dissolved the linen.

Two 13th-century skeletons pierced through the chest with iron rods, supposedly to stop them from turning into vampires, were found near a monastery in the Black Sea town of Sozopol in Bulgaria in 2012. Around 100 similar burials have been found in Bulgaria, with more in neighbouring Serbia and other Balkan countries. [FT291:20].

A 16th century male skeleton excavated in Kamien Pomorski, Poland, in 2014 had the front teeth knocked out and a rock inserted in the mouth – and the legs had been pierced, presumably to stop the undead wandering at night [FT316:14].

Vampire ‘remedies’ were practised in New England in the 19th century – records of at least 16 cases have been found. It was believed that those who died of consumption (tuberculosis) returned from the dead, feeding on the blood of their kinsfolk and causing them to waste away. Dead consumptives were sometimes disinterred, their hearts burned and the ashes used in medicine [FT80:46-47]. A similar rite was performed in Romania as recently as 2004, when Petre Toma, 76, a supposed vampire, was dug up, his chest opened with a wooden stake, and his heart removed and burnt [FT187:22]. *news.sky.com*, 12 Oct; *independent.co.uk*, 13 Oct 2018.

- Alongside the spectacular Iron Age chariot burial unearthed at Pocklington, East Yorkshire [FT361:18], archaeologists have found a pair of 3rd century BC graves of high status individuals showing evidence of vampire-slaying rituals. The first grave contained a male warrior, aged between 17 and 25, who appears to have been ‘killed’ two or three times: his body had been pierced by nine spears after his death – five with iron tips and four with bone. He had also been bashed on the forehead. One explanation for the body being pierced by spears is that he might have died of natural causes and not in battle, and the ritual of spearing allowed him the privilege of dying a warrior’s death. Alternatively, he might have been a suspected vampire ‘neutralised’ through spearing. This would explain why the skeleton was found with metal still inside it. *Hull Daily Mail* (online), 10 Dec 2018.

FAUX VAMPIRE

A woman who thought she was a vampire from a TV show stabbed her new boyfriend to try and “fulfil her mission to slay werewolves”. Ekaterina Tirskaya, 22, and her unnamed lover slept together for the first time last February after meeting on social media. In the morning she suddenly ‘changed’, telling him she was a vampire like Elena Gilbert in the fantasy drama *The Vampire Diaries*. He said he didn’t believe in the supernatural, and urged her to go home. “She grabbed a knife in the kitchen and suddenly attacked him when he was getting out of the bath,” one report said. “He managed to get hold of the knife. But she grabbed another one and stabbed him in the chest.” He staggered out of his flat and banged on neighbours’ doors pleading for help. They called for an ambulance and police. The man was gravely wounded but survived. A psychological assessment carried out before Tirskaya’s trial in Novosibirsk, Russia, reportedly found her to be sane. She was jailed for two and a half years and ordered to pay £3,900 in ‘moral damages’ to her stabbed lover. *metro.co.uk*, 16 Nov 2018.

232: THE SLIPPERY SLOPE



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth If you try to clear ice or snow from the pavement outside your home, and someone later falls over there, you can be sued. Sued! For being public-spirited! But if you do nothing, and they fall over, you’re in the clear.

The “truth”

Every winter this warning appears in several newspapers, in the guise of a news story: because of “health and safety” having “gone mad” the simple, neighbourly act of sweeping away the snow puts you in danger of legal action. And every year, various arms of government, and health and safety bodies, debunk it. English law is perfectly clear in this matter: you are neither required to clear your stretch of pavement (as in some countries) nor are you forbidden from doing so, or advised not to do so. You can only be sued for negligence if you are negligent. Clearly, no court would consider a reasonable attempt to make a pavement safer for pedestrians to be legally negligent. Furthermore, the legal onus is on the users of public areas to take sensible precautions.

Sources

www.gov.uk/government/news/snow-clearing-health-and-safety-myth-shattered; www.gov.uk/clear-snow-road-path-cycleway; www.mirror.co.uk/money/storm-emma-facts-your-rights-12110650

Disclaimer

The current government advice says that “It’s unlikely that you’ll be sued or held responsible if someone is injured on a path or pavement if you’ve cleared it carefully.” That use of “unlikely” sounds a bit cautious – and is a useful reminder that this column does not actually hold a degree in The Law of Torts. But has anyone in this country ever, in fact, been successfully sued for removing snow or ice from a public pavement?

Mythchaser

A reader remembers being told at school that when frost kills a plant it’s not the freezing that causes the damage, but the thawing. Her attempts in adulthood to clarify this have produced answers ranging from yes to no, via “It depends what you mean by...” Can anyone provide her with the cold, hard facts of the matter?





STRANGE DAYS

EXHIBITION REPORT

HOME FUTURES: LIVING IN YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW

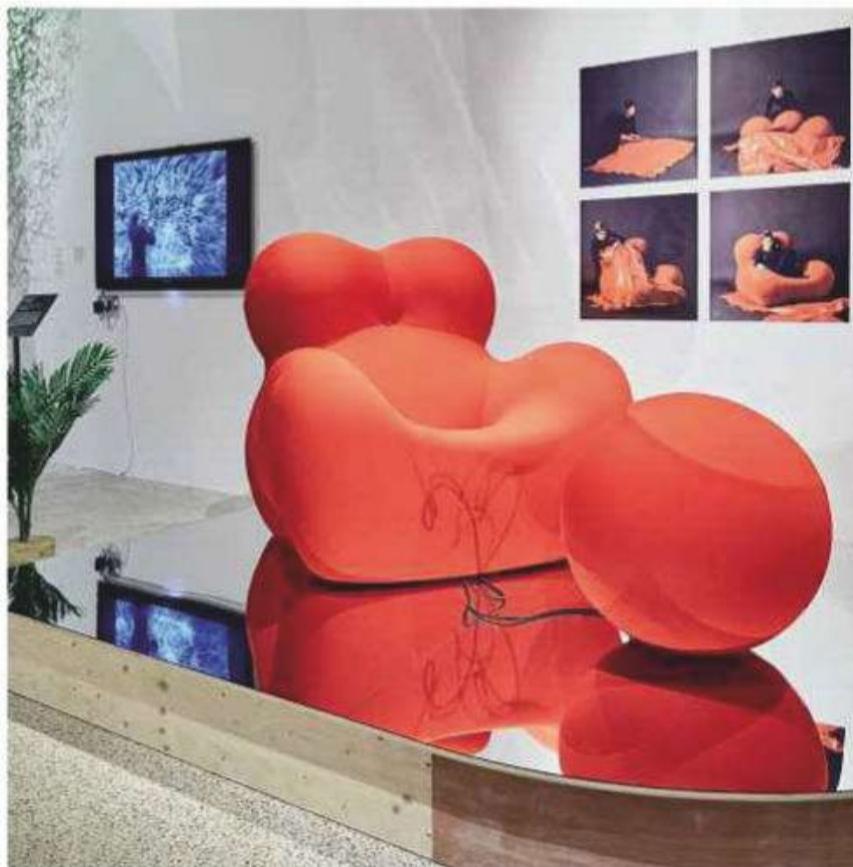
In every dream home a heartache: DAVID V BARRETT explores the shape of futures past in a new exhibition at the Design Museum where the modernist mantra of form over function makes for a disappointing experience

For those of us who grew up as avid SF readers, or who watched BBC's *Tomorrow's World*, we're living in the future now. Our homes, our transport, our communications, even our food would be radically different, we were told back then – but how many of Raymond Baxter and James Burke's breathless visions of the future are actually with us today?

This is the question posed by *Home Futures: Living in Yesterday's Tomorrow*, an exhibition and book from the Design Museum in Kensington, London (housed in the old Commonwealth Institute, familiar from several *Fortean Times* UnConventions).

In fact, the exhibition shows how dated, impractical and frankly uncomfortable most of those futuristic, functionalist visions were: chairs that no one in their right mind would ever want to sit on, and housing units (forget the word "home") that exemplify Corbusier's dictum "A house is a machine for living in". With space increasingly at a premium, rooms are made to fulfil several functions, walls can be moved around and everything is crammed in; but no one ever seems to ask about the claustrophobic effect, let alone the comfort of such micro-apartments, the modernist dream (or nightmare) of the rationalist home.

Push-button fantasies were common in the 1950s and 1960s vision of the home of the future. Delightfully, the 1962 Hanna-Barbera cartoon *The Jetsons* plays on a TV: a family living in a world of automated luxury in 2062; robots do domestic work, cooking and other chores; cars can fly; we have videophones instead of telephones. Most of it is still fantasy. One of



ABOVE: An inflatable armchair by Gaetano Pesce for B&B Italia, 1969; just don't try and sit in it while you read the book that accompanies this exhibition.

the few prophesied devices actually to become reality is the self-propelled robot vacuum cleaner, though the delight on the face of the housewife in the 1959 RCA Whirlpool Miracle Kitchen looks a little naïve to us today. But having our home controlled through a central computer is at last happening – with attendant hacking hazards no one thought of in the 1950s.

A practical creation from 1963, the Mini Kitchen, designed by Joe Colombo, is a compact wheeled unit with hobs, fridge, worktop and storage space that takes the kitchen wherever you want it to be – and it's still in production.

At the other extreme, some prophets of the future believed rightly that we would be able to work from home or elsewhere, but their vision of the mobile office was hilarious: a man sits inside a large transparent bubble in the middle of a field, tapping away at a typewriter on

his lap.

The exhibition has five main areas: Living Smart, Living with Less, Living with Others, Living Autonomously and Domestic Arcadia, linked together by a winding path, Living on the Move. For an exhibition all about living, little of it is interactive, even at the most basic level, and what there is, is confusing: chairs and other surfaces look as if they can be sat on, but the attendants quickly move you off them. The displays themselves compound the confusion. Immediately above a polyurethane "lounge chair" resembling a clump of grass is a large photo of children playing in it – but you're forbidden to touch it; nearby, a very inviting inflatable red armchair has the same problem. But things that look like exhibits, wavy benches, a chain-link *something*, and even fake rocks, you're welcome to sit on – but nothing

tells you so; useful signage is minimal. Remarkably, just a week after the exhibition opened, you weren't allowed to sit in one seat, like a bird's nest, that you were supposed to, and a large-scale mobile was broken.

Considering this is the Design Museum, the exhibition lacks focus. It suffers from classic form-over-function: exhibits that look good but are often poorly explained. Spread out, the 150-plus items (including pictures and films) seem surprisingly scant. The lavishly illustrated book is not only far better designed, and contains far more, it does a far better job of contextualising the exhibits, following the format of the exhibition, and in the half-dozen essays discussing in some fascinating detail different visions of the home.

Home Futures is a great concept, but the exhibition misses the mark in so many ways. Part of the reason for this diffuseness may be that it is a joint collaboration with the Ikea Museum in Sweden; there's even a little fake Ikea catalogue that "visualises what form a potential Ikea catalogue might take in the near future" – but it's a left-over from a 2015 project and isn't even linked to this exhibition, and badly needs proof reading. That's careless design. Among the many missed opportunities, neither the exhibition nor the book even mentions *Tomorrow's World* – and there are very few mentions of science fiction either.

Home Futures: Living in Yesterday's Tomorrow is at the Design Museum, Kensington, London until March 24. *Home Futures*, ed. Eszter Steierhoffer & Justin McGuirk, Design Museum 2018, 304pp, £24.95, ISBN 9781872005423



KARL SHUKER goes in search of a terrifying sea monster and some performing Thai trolls



OFF / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

COUSTEAU'S MISSING MONSTER

On 29 November 2018, fellow UK cryptozoologist Richard Freeman brought to my attention an intriguing article written by Zineb Boujrada and posted earlier that year on Culture Trip's website, concerning a hitherto obscure East African aquatic cryptid. Djibouti's so-called 'Island of the Devil' (Ghoubbet Al-Kharab) earns its name from a terrifying sea monster called the *sheytan* ('devil') that locals believe exists in the bay (the Ghoubbet) surrounding the island. Making this account especially interesting was its inclusion of what seemed to be a truly extraordinary claim – that France's famous undersea explorer and diver Jacques Cousteau had not only obtained proof of the *sheytan*'s reality but also "insisted it never be revealed to humanity".

Quoting from Boujrada's Culture Trip article: "According to local newspapers at the time, Cousteau and his team conducted an experiment to explore the depths of the Ghoubet by submerging a camel carcass in a cage. To their surprise, as they took it out of the water, they discovered that the cage had been entirely smashed and deformed, resulting in the disappearance of the carcass."

I posted links to the article on Facebook cryptozoology-related groups, hoping to elicit further information or clarification. Veteran French cryptozoologist Michel Raynal duly informed me on 30 November that the local Djibouti newspapers' claims were unfounded rumour, and that in 1971 Cousteau had publicly denied it in his book *Life and Death in a Coral Sea*. (Michel kindly sent me a copy of the relevant passage). As this incident appears never to have attracted cryptozoological attention, I present Cousteau's own statement:

"...we decided to visit the Goubet, a famous gulf of the Red Sea. Before leaving Djibouti that morning, one of our crew had by chance asked a local Arab diver about the Goubet. 'Ah, sir,' the man had replied, 'it is a most extraordinary place. It is bottomless, and it is inhabited by monsters so large that they can drag down lines attached to 200-litre cans. Moreover, in 1963, Commandant Cousteau went there with Fredéric Dumas and his best divers, and they were so terrified by what they saw that they ran away.'

"Naturally, we were eager to see the place in which, according to local gossip, we had earned so ignominious a reputation. I must report, however, that the Goubet was a disappointment. It is an inland sea or gulf that connects with the Red Sea by a narrow pass in which there is a very strong current, running up to seven knots. The surrounding area is very beautiful, and very wild, being dominated by volcanic mountains bare of foliage and marked in shades of red, yellow, and black.

"Once in the Goubet itself, we lowered the diving saucer [pictured above] to a depth of over six hundred feet [183m] without catching sight of even a small monster. The divers then suited up and went down also, but they saw nothing more remarkable than some very large sea urchins. There seemed to be very few fish of any kind. It is my guess that the 'Goubet monster' of Arab legend was originally a manta ray, seen by some shepherd from a hilltop. Manta rays are plentiful in this area, and it must happen occasionally that they wander into the Goubet and – because the inlet is so narrow and because mantas are not the most intelligent of beasts – have trouble finding their way out again."

Consequently, it would seem that either the *sheytan* is real but remained remarkably well hidden when Cousteau conducted his actual search for it, or it is indeed just a local legend. My thanks to Richard and Michel for alerting and assisting me in my investigation.

Richard Freeman, pers. comm., 29 Nov; Michel Raynal, pers. comm., 30 Nov 2018; <https://theculturetrip.com/africa/djibouti/articles/what-and-where-is-the-island-of-the-devil/>

TROLLS IN THAILAND?

On 2 November 2018, American tourist Jemayel Khawaja not only witnessed but also videoed an astonishing spectacle – six small and very hairy humanoid entities, variously likened in subsequent media reports to Scandinavian trolls or Star Wars ewoks, engaged in some kind of strange and decidedly raucous ritual in the waters near Phra Nang Cave off Thailand's Krabi coast, and accompanied by the sound of Thai clarinets!

Khawaja was one of several foreigners in kayaks and aboard a tour boat to watch in stupefied amazement as the entities disported themselves for around half an hour. When Khawaja posted her video on Facebook later that same day, it swiftly went viral, attracting over three million views and all manner of comments and speculation.

Cryptozoologically, it all seemed too good to be true – and, sure enough, it was. On 6 November, the trolls, or ewoks, were revealed to be a group of actors in furry costumes who had been participating in an exhibition of performance art for the Thailand Biennale, a national art festival, the performance having been devised by Norwegian artist Tori Wrånes, long known for her interest in trolls and creating rituals. Moreover, her Thai trolls will be appearing daily at the Phra Nang Cave throughout the entire four-month biennale, until 28 February 2019. So if you happen to be in the Krabi coast area during this period, be sure to pay them a visit.

<https://coconuts.co/bangkok/news/video-ewok-like-creatures-chilling-krabi-cave-turn-performance-art-piece/>



FACEBOOK / JEMAYEL KHAWAJA



FATAL ERRORS

Turning up at your own funeral is a surprisingly common experience for many supposedly deceased folks in these cases of corpse confusion

- “When Uncle Aigali walked through the door two months after we’d buried him, my daughter Saule nearly dropped dead of a heart attack,” said Esengali Supygaliev. The 63-year-old Kazakh man had left home one June morning and didn’t come back. He had been known to wander off for a week or two before, so the family waited a month before contacting the police – who in due course asked them to identify a badly burnt body. DNA tests showed that these were the mortal remains of Aigali Supygaliev “with 99.2 per cent certainty”, the authorities said, and issued an official death certificate. In September the family buried Aigali in the Muslim cemetery of Tomarly, their hometown just north of the Caspian Sea port of Atyrau. They held a wake, and the extended family organised a traditional *konil shai* ceremony, where friends could share tea and sympathy with the bereaved.

So, when Aigali turned up, he had some explaining to do. It turns out that he had taken up an offer of work in a nearby village from a man he’d met down the market. Job done, four months later Aigali walked back to Tomarly. The forensic scientist who carried out the DNA analysis said that she stood by her 99.2 per cent findings, “but you



LEFT: Aigali Supygaliev poses with the expensive tombstone his family had paid for. Uncle Aigali was not dead, it transpired, but working in a nearby village.

must never forget that other 0.8 per cent”. The Supygalievs were not pleased that they had already paid for a tombstone, and commissioned a stone shrine over the grave in the Kazakh tradition. They had even returned the pension payments for the two months that Aigali was “dead”, and were considering legal action – as well as wondering who they had buried. *BBC News*, 5 Nov 2018.

- Slava Brushkov was serving a short prison sentence in the Georgian port city of Batumi when he learned he had been declared dead in his local village, some 50 miles (80km) away. Neighbours had noticed his sudden absence, and as he had no living relatives, they informed the police. The authorities wrongly assumed a

The family were not pleased that they had already paid for a tombstone

badly mutilated body found in a field a few days previously was Brushkov, and the body was buried in a cemetery near the graves of his parents. “When I left the prison, I went to clean my mother’s and father’s grave and near their feet some new deceased was lying,” said Brushkov. “I have no idea who he might be.” He has nevertheless been taking care of the grave. Last Easter he brought red eggs, wine and other offerings to it, as is the custom in Georgia. Georgians have a tradition of taking care of abandoned graves, even

those of relative strangers, especially in the Imereti region, where Brushkov lives. *BBC News*, 29 June 2017.

- After two years of working in Bangkok and on fishing vessels, Sakorn Sachiwa, 44, a resident of Thailand’s Si Sa Ket province, returned home on 17 December 2017 to the surprise of his family. “You are dead,” said his mother. “How could you come home?” The previous May, a Bangkok policeman had asked Sakorn’s family to come to Vajira Hospital and claim his body. An autopsy showed he had died of “digestive infection”; but his relatives were uncertain the body was Sakorn’s: the dead man had all his front teeth, while Sakorn had two missing. However, the police insisted it was him because they found a copy of his ID card and a security firm’s employee card with the name and picture of Sakorn in a rented room where he was found dead. Presumably overcoming their doubts, the family brought the body back home for cremation. Sakorn said he had lost his ID card but later applied for a new one. He returned home after working on fishing boats for a year. He planned to ask the district officer to reinstate his legal status so that he could claim social welfare. *Thai PBS*, 20 Dec 2017.



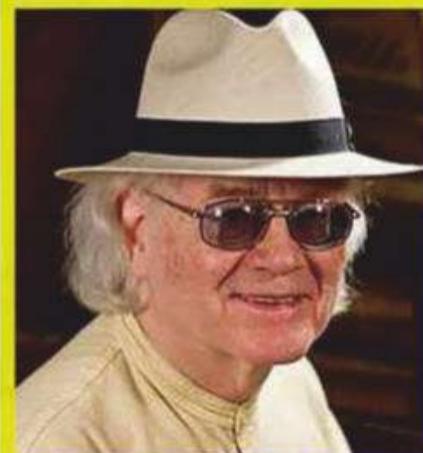
ABOVE LEFT: Sakorn Sachiwa – still with us, after all. ABOVE RIGHT: The wake for Juan Ramón Alfonso Penayo proved somewhat premature – but who was in the coffin?



• Ahmed Tameem, 22, an Afghan policeman, was on duty in Kabul on 27 January 2018 when a Taliban bomber drove an ambulance past two checkpoints on a busy street and detonated explosives. More than 100 people were killed and at least 200 wounded. Tameem's phone was switched off; his relatives went to every city hospital, but could find no trace of him. After two days they returned to the morgue. Examining the mutilated remains, they settled on a torso that was skinny and young, like Tameem; forensic staff did some blood tests and said it was him. The government gave the family a death payment of about £1,500. A few days later, friends dug a grave in a Kabul cemetery as about 200 mourners took cover from the snow in a tent. The family had convinced Tameem's mother that his death was God's will and that the coffin should remain sealed. At the family home, relatives prepared for the rituals of moving on. Someone opened the door of a cage to let Officer Tameem's two pet parrots free. Then one of the policeman's brothers got a call from Tameem in hospital. He was badly burned and breathing with the help of a ventilator as he went in and out of consciousness – but he was not dead. When a cousin rang the family to tell them the good news, one of the sisters fainted. "Maybe it was the prayer of those parrots who were freed from the cage," Ghulam Naqshband, an elderly neighbour, said. The buried torso will probably remain unidentified. *NY Times*, 6 Feb 2018.

• On 6 May 2017, a man was found dead behind a Verizon store in Santa Ana, California. The coroner's office told Frank J Kerrigan, 82, of Wildomar, that the body was that of his son Frank Kerrigan, 57, who is mentally ill and had been living on the street. When he asked whether he should

MISSING PERSON



SCOTT CUSHNIE



*We are looking for Scott Cushnie and need your help.
We are looking for any STREET CAMERA FOOTAGE.*

He likes to go for long walks and is a gentle friendly person. He is of sound mind and not a risk taker. His disappearance is a big mystery to all that know him well and love him. The police are doing all they can.

ABOVE: Scott Cushnie's body was mixed up with that of another missing man.

identify the body, a woman told him that ID had been made through fingerprints. The family held a \$20,000 funeral, attended by 50 people, on 12 May. Eleven days later, Frank Kerrigan Senior got a call from his friend Bill Shinker, who passed the phone to his supposedly dead son, who said: "Hi Dad". It later transpired that coroner's officials had been unable to match the corpse's fingerprints through a law enforcement database and instead identified Kerrigan using an old driver's licence photo. We are not told if the dead man was identified. (*Victoria BC Times Colonist*, 25 June; <i>26 June 2017.

• A man from the small village of Santa Teresa in Paraguay returned home after three days away to find his family mourning a body they thought was his. Juan Ramón Alfonso Penayo, 20, had last been seen on 14 June leaving the family home on the border with Brazil. The area is hotly disputed between a number of drug gangs and when he did not return, his family assumed foul play. When

police found a charred body on 17 June, they concluded it was him. The family held a wake in the village, only for Penayo to turn up and find them grieving over the coffin. The still unidentified body was returned to the morgue. If no one claimed it, it would be interred as NN (Latin *nomen nescio*, name unknown). *BBC News*, 19 June 2018.

• Last year, a Japanese man in his 40s disappeared from his home in Matsudo, Chiba Prefecture, and his family filed a missing persons report. On 21 June 2017 police found an unconscious man in the Edo River in eastern Tokyo. There was no ID on him, but his facial and body features matched those of the missing man. He died shortly after in hospital. The wife and two other relatives of the missing man were called to identify the body, which they did, confirming that "there was no mistake". The body was handed over to the family and subsequently cremated. Imagine their surprise when, on 6 June 2018, he turned up, alive and well. His wife

informed the police, who determined the dead man was a Tokyo resident in his 30s. His family had also filed a missing persons report shortly after the police had mistaken his body for the man in his 40s. *Japan Today*, 13 June 2018.

• Scott Cushnie, 80, a blind Canadian pianist known as "Professor Piano", went missing from his Toronto flat in August. It appears he suffered a fall and died in hospital. His body was wrongly identified and returned to the family of another missing man, who held a funeral. The second missing man (unnamed) later turned up alive. Meanwhile, the pianist's friends were still trying to find him. The mix-up was discovered after a key fob for Cushnie's building was found in the clothes of the dead man. *D. Telegraph*, 18 Oct 2018.

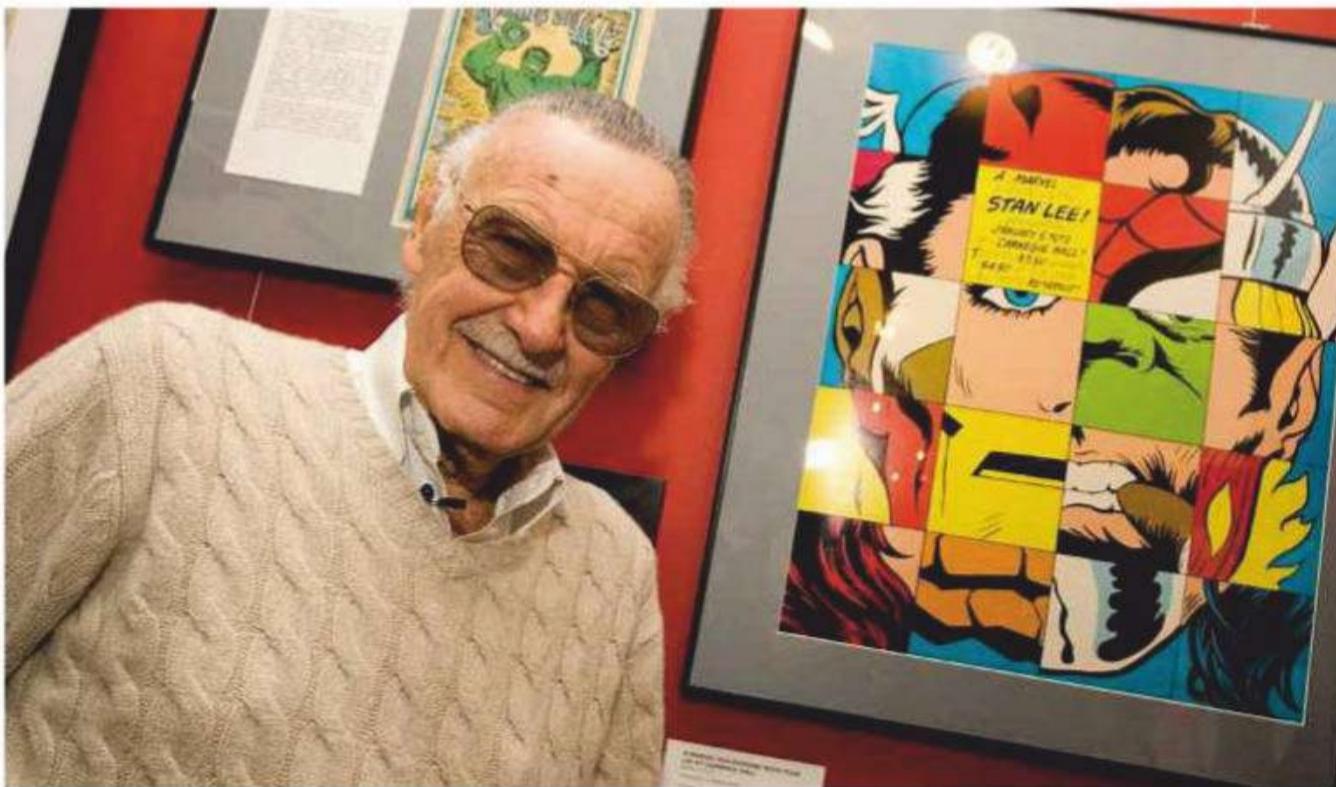
• Back in 1999, when he was 31, Somsak Somying left his home in Ban Sangkhla, Surin province, Thailand, and went to work in the construction industry in Bangkok. In 2016, as his family had heard nothing from him, they held a funeral and cremated an empty coffin to put his memory to rest. Then on 6 September, Somsak, now 50, reappeared at the family home. Somsak explained that his friends had deserted him, and because he couldn't read he didn't know how to get home. Homeless, he did odd jobs for a while before ending up in Phuket, where he worked on a fishing boat. The agent who got him this job took his ID and he was beaten up by men on the vessel who did drugs. He wound up being arrested in Malaysia and spent several months in jail there before being repatriated to Thailand, where he worked in an ice factory before being checked out by police for having no ID. With help from a charitable foundation, he eventually found his way home. *thaivisa.com*, 12 Sept 2018.



STRANGE DAYS

NECROLOG

This month, we mourn the passing of the much-loved father of Marvel Comics and the British philosopher who put the dangers of scientism in the spotlight



MAT SZWAJAKOS / GETTY IMAGES

STAN LEE

It's been said before that Stan Lee's greatest creation was himself, and in a sense that is true: from the 1960s until his death in November 2018, Lee was the visible face of the comic book industry, dragging a despised medium – which he once described as inhabiting "the absolute bottom of the cultural totem pole" – into semi-respectability, pop-cultural pre-eminence and, ultimately, the sort of world domination only dreamt of by the most powerful of super-villains.

Lee was born Stanley Martin Lieber in Manhattan, New York City, in 1922, the elder son of Romanian Jewish immigrants. He attended high school in the Bronx, and to bring in extra income for the family worked at part-time jobs delivering sandwiches, selling newspaper subscriptions and ushering at the Rivoli Theatre. After winning a school competition sponsored by the *New York Herald Tribune*, Lee was determined to become a writer, and on graduating from High School in 1939 a family connection landed him an assistant job at what was then Timely Comics. At

Timely, located on Manhattan's West 42nd Street, the 17-year-old office gofer filled artists' inkwells, fetched their lunches and proofread pages. Two years later, in an issue of *Captain America Comics*, featuring Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's pseudonymous patriotic hero, Lee made his writing debut with a two-page, text-only filler story entitled "Captain America Foils the Traitor's Revenge"; its young author later recalled creating the pen name 'Stan Lee' in order to leave 'Stanley Lieber' free to one day write the Great American Novel. Lee soon graduated to writing actual comics and, aged 19, was promoted to editor. His career was interrupted by WWII, in which he served in the US Signal Corps and the Training Film Division, where he produced manuals, training films and posters on topics such as venereal disease and the operation of the M-10 rifle.

After the war, Lee continued to work at Timely, which by the 1950s had morphed into Atlas, editing and writing comics that mirrored changing public taste: Westerns, romance, monster stories, science fiction, crime and

horror. After Fredric Wertham's crusade against comic books stirred up a full-scale moral panic (see FT320:28-35) and saw the introduction of the Comics Code in 1954, the industry moved toward more 'wholesome' genres. When DC comics enjoyed success with their superhero team book, *Justice League of America*, Lee's boss, Martin Goodman, always ready to copy a good idea, suggested his editor come up with something on the same lines. The start of what became known as the 'Marvel Age' came in 1961, when Lee – who had been contemplating quitting comics for good – and Jack Kirby co-created *The Fantastic Four*, a family team of scientific explorers who gain unsettling powers – what Fort would have termed 'wild talents' – when their space rocket is bombarded with cosmic rays. While there was still a whiff of the 1950s monster books about the first issue, the template for Marvel's future success was already there: a mixture of exciting, often SF-derived concepts, relatable characters marked by their all-too-human flaws (as opposed to DC's godlike heroes), and a moral universe

in which conflict was as likely to be internal or psychological as it was physical. And it was all wrapped up in a package of dynamic artwork and storytelling, with Lee's love of language, from rolling biblical phrases and cod-Shakespeare to Lower East Side demotic, on prominent display.

The next few years saw Lee and his team of artists – he somehow managed to edit and write nearly everything himself through the 1960s – working at white heat to produce one hit comic after another. None of them could have dreamt that, half a century later, these supposedly ephemeral titles would be household names: Spider-Man, the Incredible Hulk, the Mighty Thor, Iron Man, Black Panther, Daredevil, Nick Fury: Agent of SHIELD, the Silver Surfer. Captain America was revived, now a man out of time, and absorbed into the ranks of Marvel's own super-team, *The Avengers*; another new comic, *The X-Men*, featured a team of young mutant outcasts, feared by mainstream society for their otherness. Lee later wrote that "a story without a message, however subliminal, is like a man without a soul", and his careful balancing of text and subtext meant that a book like *The X-Men* could be read as a reflection of everything from the Civil Rights movement to a metaphor for the experience of growing up gay. What's more, all of these diverse characters appeared to inhabit the same world, frequently showing up in one another's comics.

Lee's creation and oversight of a coherent 'shared universe' was an impressive achievement, but by giving it a humanistic ethical dimension and allying it to a politically progressive worldview, Lee also made Marvel a distinctive pop cultural phenomenon of the 1960s. All of this was



articulated through his unique editorial voice, which turned previously uncredited comic book artists into familiar names and used the 'Bullpen Bulletin' and 'Stan's Soapbox' columns to make readers feel they were part of an exclusive club of 'True Believers'. Arguably, Lee's real achievement was about more than just producing memorable characters and comics: it was about imagining a future in which they could thrive. By giving the medium a new sophistication, targeting college-age and adult readers (see a letter from a certain *FT* founder in our editorial), and making comics part of the wider cultural conversation, Lee paved the way for the now universal influence of geek culture on the mainstream and the success of every world-building film franchise from *Star Wars* to *Harry Potter*.

By the beginning of the 1970s Lee was no longer editing and writing every book in the ever-expanding Marvel stable, and in 1972 became the company's publisher, a post he held until 1996. By that time, he had been living in Los Angeles for over a decade, diverting much of his seemingly inexhaustible energy into developing Marvel properties for film and television, with mixed results. Perhaps the time (and the technology) was not yet right for Spider-Man or Thor to make the transition from comic book page to cinema screen, but the current global success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe must have validated Lee's sense that his instincts had been right, just somewhat premature.

While writing occasional comics for Marvel and continuing to act in a 'figurehead' role for the company, Lee also pursued his own business ventures. His later career was marked by disagreement about what some argued was his failure to give sufficient credit to artists for the co-creation of characters such as Spider-Man, and his last years – following the death of his wife of 69 years,

Joan, in 2017 – saw a number of accusations of business irregularities and elder abuse levelled at those who were supposed to have his best interests at heart. Nevertheless, Lee continued to be a tireless promoter for comics, a constant presence at conventions, and even embarked on a second career (reaching a whole new audience) playing cameo roles in Marvel film adaptations, starting in 2000 with *The X-Men* and continuing until his death.

Stan Lee, comic book writer, editor and publisher, born New York City, 28 Dec 1922; died Los Angeles, 12 Nov 2018, aged 95.

MARY MIDGLEY

The British philosopher Mary Midgley was once described as "our foremost scourge of scientific pretension". She made her name with her 1978 book *Beast and Man*, a challenge to the excesses of sociobiology. It was published in her 60th year, and she retired from her senior lectureship at the University of Newcastle a few years later to devote herself full-time to writing. Eighteen more books followed, spanning topics in ethics and philosophy of science, although her open-ended, exploratory style of thinking resisted easy disciplinary classification.

Midgley was born in 1919, and raised in Cambridge, Greenford and Ealing. Her early studies at Cambridge and Oxford resulted in a love of philosophy, amplified by good friendships with other distinguished women philosophers, including Iris Murdoch. Midgley, though, found the climate at those institutions inhospitable – aggressive, combative, decoupled from everyday life and concerns. A lectureship at Reading offered escape, before she headed north to Newcastle. Both offered warmer intellectual climates, hospitable to curiosity and debate, although Mary only started publishing late in her career. "I wrote no books until I was a good 50," she explained, "and I'm jolly glad because I didn't know what

I thought before then." Once she got going, she was prolific, publishing over 280 books, articles, and other pieces for academic and scientific journals, magazines, and newspapers.

Midgley is perhaps best known for her attacks on scientism – exaggerated, distorted conceptions of the nature, scope, and value of science. She never derided science, and her writing on animals and evolutionary biology were marked by close engagement with current research and practitioners (Jane Goodall was a close friend and ally). "We do not need to esteem science less," she argued, but "to esteem it in the right way." In books such as *Evolution as a Religion*, the strategy was the negative one of trying to expose the limitations and distortions of certain images of science. Our spiritual needs, for instance, cannot be met by the biological sciences, nor need they be. Evolution can inform moral and spiritual thinking without needing to take them over. Excitement can tend to excess, which, left unchecked, leave us with "distorted exaltations" of the sciences. Closer attention to the practice of science and to the complexities and variety of human life are therefore essential virtues.

In Midgley's books, like *The Myths We Live By* and *Science and Poetry*, the theme is the importance of pluralism. Human life is complicated, requiring many ways of thinking, each with its own limitations and powers. Scientism artificially reduces our resources, by trying to turn over all of the work to the sciences. Different jobs require different tools; different problems require different ways of thinking – a sensitive pluralism encompassing the full array of scientific, philosophical, emotional, and poetic knowledge, as well as what Midgley called "myths" or "imaginative visions", which lend structure and salience to our thinking. Such myths must be scrutinised, since they can be corrupt, obsolete, or unfit for purpose. Myths we live by can also be myths we

die by. One job for philosophers is to describe these myths and visions, bringing them to our attention and pointing out their limits.

Midgley's philosophical work spanned a striking range of topics – animals, ethics, evolution, science, religion, poetry, and the environment. She lacked systematic pretensions, instead embracing a rather pragmatic conception of philosophy as "plumbing", an activity of maintaining the subterranean ways of thinking that organise our lives, which often break down, sometimes with disastrous consequences. She was constantly alert to our tendencies to reductionism and abstraction. It's fine to reduce, as long as one remains aware of the wider wholes. It's fine to abstract, as long as one remembers to go back and put in what one took out. Our relations to science are only one place we see these tendencies, but the costs of failure there are very high.

Midgley was working right up to the day she died. "I keep thinking that I shall have no more to say," she said in 2001, "and then find some wonderfully idiotic doctrine which I can contradict." If the tone sounds combative, the motives were sensible and pragmatic. We have to get our ways of thinking right, since if they go wrong, so will our life and practice. Philosophy must be alert to such errors and excesses and must aim "always to help us through the present difficulty". Forteans should sympathise with the spirit and concerns of her work. Those who haven't read it would do so with profit. Dogmatism and cynicism about science are to be avoided, even if both have their temptations and their champions. Mary Midgley offered wise, sensible, informed guidance on thinking clearly about the complexities of the sciences and their places in human life.

Mary Beatrice Midgley, philosopher, born London, 13 Sept 1919; died Newcastle, 10 Oct 2018, aged 99.
Ian James Kidd



Another set of motley, cap and bells

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

Cap, bells and whistles too. And more than one harlequin to parade in them. One has recently been suitably boogled [*sic*] by Dr J Burke's wheeze that the Roswell incident was an alien psychic smoke-and-mirrors job and Art Greenfield's eye-opener-among-many that Hitler was abducted by aliens. One had hoped that this stream of increasingly baroque refreshments of hoary old tales might dry up for a while. But no. The fecund and ever-fruitful ufological garden of unearthly delights (for this is an open-air theatre) has brought forth a couple more song-and-dance routines to decorate some familiar antique dramatics. One promises amazing new revelations about the Rendlesham Incident, the other enlivens everything you thought you knew about NASA's Apollo missions. Truly, ufology is an unfailing spring, if of rather rum waters.

A bunch of folk called Indigo Transmit Films will be releasing a documentary called *Capel Green*, come the spring. It "will introduce new witnesses and show a number of re-enactments never seen before... both in the air and on the ground to reveal for the first time the actual facts and the true extent of what really occurred over those incredible few nights." Oh, aye. Lead witness is Larry Warren, whose reliability, truthfulness, and transparency has been rather severely questioned – whether on the matter of Rendlesham or on relics of the late John Lennon. In addition to the (already somewhat fluid) standard story, Warren now has red lights whizzing around close to the ground near a landed UFO. Pass the salt, but save a larger portion for a previously undiscovered 'witness', supposedly then a USAF sergeant, who says he toted an M60 machine gun into the forest to show the aliens a thing or two. The M60 usually has a crew of two, but not this time it seems. With the doughty sergeant came sundry other gung-ho souls armed with M16s. Entirely illegal, and infinitely improbable, but I suppose we now have to take the testimony of those who did venture among the trees – that they checked their weapons at the East Gate – as all part of the Monstrous Cover-Up. Guffaw. You may relish the trailer for this pageant of made-over marvels at <https://youtu.be/5lz6AG1G3hk>. I can't wait to see what other new bells and



whistles the full-length version will adorn this never-ending tale. Or to hear what his rival 'star' (sorry) witnesses have to say about it. Praise the aliens and pass the popcorn.

WHAT EDGAR DID (REALLY)

To the baroque we have an added dash of rococo in the next story, to which I was led by a post on Bob Sheaffer's blog, by one Albert Venczel, as follows [*sic* throughout]: "i do know for a fact that Hal Puthoff has working Zero Point Energy which was derived from Alien contact. The shadow Govt does NOT want you to have it. Puthoff's lips are sealed...."

Now, it's no great secret that Puthoff was hanging around Kirtland AFB and other places, trying to get energy out of nothing flat. But as far as I know no one's claimed before that he had the help of aliens – which is quite a surprise, given the gamut of loopiness loose in the world. And it's generally thought that his efforts came to naught. But no, says Venczel. Rather, during the low-Earth, stationary orbit segment of the Apollo 14 space flight, aliens fed Edgar Mitchell some amazing stuff, presumably telepathically. It's known that Mitchell did some unofficial ESP experiments during this mission, with questionable results. What's new from Venczel: "...the encounter between Mitchell and these ETs resulted in a transfer of technological information in the form of an otherworldly 'scientific textbook'. This textbook has since been reverse-engineered by Hal Puthoff... Perhaps the most important revelation of this article is the incontrovertible fact that, today, Zero Point Energy is working, and being suppressed at the highest levels by a cabal operating within the United States government."

Aah. But of course.

LEFT: Can a new documentary about the Rendlesham Forest Incident really throw new light on the case after all these years?

Mitchell also was given a warning from the aliens of the 9/11 attacks, which was also vouchsafed to psychic Ingo Swann, who had set up this telepathic exchange. At the same time, various symbols (later to appear in Microsoft's

Wingdings font, would you believe) were etched on the hull of the Apollo 14 module. Photos please? No? Thought not. For said photographs were taken home by a certain general. Whereupon: "Unfortunately, upon his arrival, he is confronted by a hostile reptilian shape-shifter who has taken on his identity in order to take his place at the Pentagon. The ensuing fight was brutal in the extreme. Ultimately, the shape-shifter was too physically powerful. In the end, he strangled the General and threw his corpse to the ground. Afterwards, he ran upstairs and tried on one of the General's shirts, paying particular attention to the collar size. [Pause for idle laughter from the cheaper seats. Others rattle jewellery.]

"At this point, what can only be called a Divine Intervention takes place. The murderous, shape-shifting reptilian is instantly teleported back to [its] Moon base, just as the lid is being blown off said base by a large, circular UFO under the control of benevolent Higher Powers. After a brief but violent conflict involving the large circular craft fending off a squadron of Black Triangle craft, all of the inhabitants are set on fire, until there's nothing left of them but a pile of ash."

You may need a little rest at this point. A decent Sancerre may help. But there's more to come, and you can read all about it at <https://ufodigest.com/article/penetration-exposed-what-really-happened>. Just as appetisers, you will learn that that *éminence grise* Col John Alexander is really a Lizard. And that the aliens' textbook of zero-point energy is now in the hands of none other than "shadowy billionaire" Robert Bigelow. Naturally you may be wondering how Albert Venczel knows all this. Remote viewing, that's how. All together now... Two, three: "Aaah. But of course."

Irish mid-air spectacular

JENNY RANDLES assesses a recent UFO incident in which testimony came from pilots and aircrew

On the morning of Friday 9 November 2018, a multi-witness UFO encounter took place in the skies over Ireland. It was fascinating because all of the witnesses were cockpit crew of three civilian passenger aircraft on the final leg of the transatlantic route. More significantly, the Irish authorities were quick to release the air traffic communication between Shannon control and the pilots. This was the second 2018 mid-air encounter in the year (after the Sonora Desert case in February; see **FT367:31**) where such data were made available.

This event occurred at about 6.47am and first to report the incident was the female pilot of flight BA (Speedbird) 94, a British Airways Boeing 787 Dreamliner, registration G-ZBJK, on a service from Montreal, Canada, to London Heathrow. The 787 was flying eastwards (heading 092) at 330mph (530 k/mph) and at a height of 39,000ft (11,900m). The skies were barely light and the plane was sandwiched between two other aircraft on similar flightpaths. Neither has reported anything, but they would have had similar lines of sight to the BA flight, so someone may yet come forward. The three aircraft had crossed the coast of western Ireland in County Kerry, just south of the Dingle.

Still out in the Atlantic, about 30 miles (48km) off the Dingle, was a Norwegian Airlines Boeing 737 MAX on flight IBK 1768 from Stewart Field in New York heading towards a landing at Shannon, western Ireland. This aircraft was EI-FYB and was about to descend but still at 34,000ft (10,400m) flying north east (heading 061). This crew also saw the incident.

The third aircraft was on Virgin flight VA 76 from Orlando, Florida, to Manchester. It was a Boeing 747 with the appropriate registration G-VBIG. This was at 36,000ft (11,000m) on heading 057, similar to the flight heading for Shannon but located about 30 miles south of the southern Irish coast. It would fly over County Kerry a few minutes later, but was on the most northerly heading, giving it the best view of the incident.

There were approximately 15 other planes in the airspace around these three aircraft. Best placed to have seen the events was G-VGAL, another Virgin 747 heading for Manchester from, Barbados.

First reporter was the female pilot of the BA flight who asked if there was military traffic as they had just seen something moving "fast". She was told no, but Shannon control added: "Speedbird 94, there is nothing showing on either primary or secondary [radar]."

"It was moving so fast," the BA pilot replied. "Mmm... surprised others could not see it... It came up on our left-hand side and then rapidly veered to the north. Very bright light. It disappeared at very high speed. We did not think it was a likely collision course. We were just wondering what it could be?"

A male voice came on air at this point (likely the Norwegian flight). "Meteor or some kind of other object making a re-entry," this air crew member suggested. "Appeared to be multiple objects following on the same kind of trajectory. They were very bright where we were." The Norwegian 737 was furthest north of all involved and likely had a spectacular view. At this point, the Virgin 76 captain arrived to say: "Er, Virgin 76 also saw that... two bright lights."

"Glad it wasn't just me," noted the Norwegian pilot. The Virgin captain added: "Yes, very interesting that one." He then continued: "[We] also saw that in our 11 o'clock position. Seemed to bank over to the right and then climb away at speed, at least from our perspective." The controller then advised the BA flight, who may not have heard the other conversations: "Speedbird 94... Just so you know, other aircraft have reported the same thing; so we are going to have a look." "Speed was phenomenal" replied the female captain of the BA 787.

As you can see, this was a brief episode but one involving at least these three jets, spread out around the south-west coast of Ireland and all seeing much the same thing. So, what was this object?

The first thought of at least one of the crew was a military exercise. Whilst Shannon had no notification of any stealth missions, these are flown to test radar neutral operations but would be improbable so near a busy air route. By far the most likely explanation is the one suggested by the Norwegian pilot: space debris or a meteor. The rapid speed fits this well; the change of direction mentioned would likely be an illusion, although meteors can skim the atmosphere. Mid-November is the peak period for the Leonid meteor shower, as the Earth's orbit passes through debris; this was a few days early, yet several reports were made to the British Astronomical Association of a bright meteor in the western sky at the time of the aircraft sightings. Two are noteworthy. In Greysteel, Northern Ireland, at 6.43am, a witness saw a large ball of bright blue/white light and another ball of light falling from it. Around the same time in Uig, Scotland, witnesses saw what looked like a plane on fire and breaking up, but "coming

in at too flat an angle". Both were north of all three aircraft and match the incident.

On 31 March 1993 there was a previous UFO incident near Mullingar. This involved an Irish Air Corps Dauphin helicopter flying from Baldonnel to Finner at 1,000ft (300m). Around 1.10am the crew observed "two white lights at a fixed distance apart in a horizontal plane... that continued to close our position from our 2 o'clock to our 8 o'clock". They watched with night vision goggles as the UFO passed above them, resembling an "unusual form of aircraft"; Shannon control advised no aircraft should be there. Just as in the 2018 case, another aircraft overflying southern Ireland joined the helicopter on Shannon control, flying close to where Speedbird 94 would 25 years later. This was an Iona Airways flight, at 20,000ft (6,000m), and they saw the same UFO as the helicopter crew. In this 1993 episode we know with reasonable certainty what both aircraft saw. A Soviet satellite, Cosmos 2238, burned up as it entered the upper atmosphere far above either plane or helicopter.

So, was a similar cause to blame for the 2018 Irish reports? Whilst no predictable or observed re-entry matches the data, several experts support the space debris theory. Seeking the views of professional pilots, I discovered that they do see meteorites from time to time at night and these can look spectacular from the cockpit. One pilot on a run to Italy spoke of them looking just like a plane on fire and breaking up, but he recognised the event as a meteor because of its flat angle of approach – reminiscent of some of the descriptions involved in this new case. Astrophysicist Michael Garrett, at Manchester University, said that he believes pilot testimony can be reliable and should be documented. However, he suspects a type of meteorite rather than a UFO was the trigger here. Astronomer Apostolos Christou, at Armagh Observatory, agreed with him that "spacedust burning up" was the most likely cause of this UFO. Something just the size of a walnut could cause a spectacular event like this, given the immense speeds and forces involved.

While we await possible new data from the crews, the final word goes to the Irish Aviation Authority who confirmed: "This report will be investigated under the normal confidential occurrence investigation process." They added that it was unlikely to turn out to be aliens from another planet. Scary as it was for those witnesses seven miles high, I must agree.

SPIRITS IN THE COMMUNITY

GERALD O'HARA presents a selection of previously unpublished spirit photographs from the York Album, in which psychic photographer Billy Hope created a unique visual record of a British Spiritualist community in the first half of the 20th century. William Hope photos courtesy Gerald O'Hara

Most people would regard meeting ghosts, talking to the deceased, levitation of people and objects, receiving gifts (that materialised out of thin air), help and advice from the departed as weird; not so for the Spiritualists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. An extraordinary range of phenomena was available within Spiritualism, and specifically to the members of the Spiritualist Church at York for over 50 years. And that community, which experienced so many of these phenomena, has left a fascinating legacy: an album of psychic photographs taken by William (Billy) Hope (1867-1933).

York Spiritualist Church was founded in 1899, and its people had a highly capable executive in President John Apedaile and Secretary William Frank, who between them managed the affairs of the community for close on half a century. In turn, the hard work, perseverance and commitment of the grassroots members of the community were founded on experiencing supernatural phenomena and receiving personal evidence of survival after death of known loved ones. This experience was collective, in that all the sitters at a séance shared the event, including witnessing the holy grail of Spiritualism, the materialisation of specific and identifiable known people. The evidence of spirit visitors, and their teachings about the spiritual nature of man, was the accepted basis of the Church's theology and cosmology.

It was taken for granted by the Spiritualists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that there was a range of phenomena that could be witnessed and that such spectacles proved that human life is eternal and humankind possessed of a spiritual nature. But what contemporary authors often overlook is that collectively witnessing the supernatural at work was both the basis of personal conviction and the creation myth of a community. Such truth,



LEFT: A group photo of the York Spiritualist Church Committee. A spirit face is visible (third from top left) and was recognised by Mr Hall as being his departed wife. FACING PAGE: A selection of Billy hope portraits of community members. In these examples, the various types of spirit form are unrecognised by the sitters and recorded as being "Psychic Extras". BELOW: Photographer William 'Billy' Hope.

Witnessing the supernatural was the creation myth of a community



experienced through different mediums, was reproducible over the life span of the individual and of the society, and proved to be a fertile recruiting platform for new church members.

One of the functions of the York Spiritualist Church Committee was to empower the secretary, William Frank, to book speakers and demonstrators of mediumship. There is good evidence to show that secretaries networked by letter and recommended or advised against particular mediums. In addition, Frank, in common with other secretaries, wrote articles for the national Spiritualist press, giving accounts of séances or "Dark Offices" that were held at York. Further, at regional meetings of district councils the merits and demerits of speakers were discussed. Frank, acting on the authority of the York Church Committee, invited William (Billy) Hope to visit in 1926. The minute books record that "Mr Hope be written respecting a visit from him re: lecture on Spirit Photography". It would be customary to enquire as to his expenses and fees and to provide accommodation and food overnight at the home of a member of the church, who would be reimbursed by the committee.

THE CREWE CIRCLE

By the mid-1920s Billy Hope was famous as a spirit photographer and had been producing work of this kind since 1905. He was Lancastrian by birth, a carpenter by trade, famously blunt, untidy and by nature jovial.



Sister : Master R. Davies
Psychic Extra :
Photographed : W. Hope (Crewe) Sept 1/2



Sister : Mrs. Davies
Psychic Extra :
Photographed : W. Hope (Crewe) Sept 1/2



Sister : Mrs. Davidson
Psychic Extra :
Photographed : W. Hope (Crewe) Sept 1/2



Sister : Mrs. Eccles
Psychic Extra :
Photographed : W. Hope (Crewe) Sept 1/2



ABOVE: Some examples of photographs in which the ‘Psychic Extras’ are marked as ‘recognised’ and their identities recorded. The 1932 photo of the Slater family features an appearance by “Mr. Jos. Slater (Husband)”, who had died 30 years earlier in 1902; for comparison, a photo of Mr Slater in life is shown at top right. The next photo is of President John Apedaile with a Psychic Extra of Hanson Hey, who had died in 1920. Hey, who was a frequent speaker at York and friend of Apedaile’s, is seen in a portrait at the far right. FACING PAGE: A number of sitters with unrecognised or recognised but unnamed Extras.

It was said that the floor of his studio in Crewe was strewn with broken glass plates. One Sunday afternoon in 1905, Hope took a portrait photograph of a friend using a wet plate; when developed, it had a white flare upon it, which as the plate dried became the picture of his friend’s deceased sister, who had died some years before. The story goes that the friend said: “Eh, thy has got a dead’un there Billy”.

Soon afterwards, Hope visited the local Spiritualist church and met Mrs Buxton, who was told that day from the platform that she had the ability to work as a medium. Billy told her of the photograph and the two struck up a friendship, forming, along with some others, what became known as the “Crewe Circle”. Such circles were created to help develop the talents of mediumistic individuals. It became apparent that the images only appeared on the photographs when Buxton and Hope sat together. Over time, others dropped out, but Billy and Mrs Buxton continued to work around the UK for the next 28 years.

The Crewe Circle was tested, approved and aided by Archdeacon Colley, who provided the camera that Hope used for the rest of his life. Another keen supporter was Arthur Conan Doyle, who publicly defended Hope when the photographer was challenged by the Society for Psychical Research and later by investigator Harry Price.

THE YORK ALBUM

The York Album came into being because of two visits by Billy Hope in 1930 and 1932 (there being no visit in 1931). It is known that Hope had previously visited York Spiritualist Church in November 1926 and 1928 and that albums existed from these sessions, but only one album has come down to the present day. The photographs in the album itself have never been published (although the author did make a study of the minute books of the church from 1899 to 1929 in his book *Dead Men’s Embers*, using some of the photographs reproduced in this article). It is hoped that eventually the entire album can be reproduced as a modern edition with explanatory text; such an album has never before been commercially produced.

The whole set of photographs reveals some interesting facts. There are 90 images in total, and each is marked in several ways. Firstly, on the top line the name of the sitter or sitters is given. On the line below is written “Psychic Extra” or “Extra”. Also on this second line a named relationship is given, or “recognised” is written; if unknown, it is left blank. On the bottom line was added the photographer – W, or Mr Hope (Crewe) – and the month and year. Analysis shows that 37 photographs were “recognised” and 12 were named – for example, “own boy” – giving a total of 49 images bearing some form of recognition. Statistically, this

means that 54.4 per cent of the photographs were accepted by the recipients as showing a person recognised and known to be deceased. It is not, of course, known whether the sitters were merely being polite in identifying 37 images as “recognised”. Of the remaining 41 images, all show some “psychic extra”. Whether there were blank sittings that showed no images is not known. The unidentified images are consistent only in their variety – that is, none are the same. Only one image shows a non-European face – that of Mr Pollard, from September 1932.

Of the 90 photographs, four types of image can be picked out. Firstly, a shroud or drape showing a face; secondly, lines of lights or energy patterns that may or may not have faces; thirdly, the flash light, where a single face appears without an energy field around it; finally, the cloud of energy, which has a face in it. The untrained eye may overlook some faces, which can appear at any angle to the sitter, including sideways and upside down. Turning the album around reveals images that would otherwise be missed. Nor are all images facing in the same direction. This phenomenon was regarded as proving that the spirits ‘swam’ in and around the sitters. Some photographs have multiple faces, and some have so much ‘energy’ that the sitter is obscured by the ‘heavenly’ clouds.

Writing can be seen indented on the reverse of the cards; however, the script is



Sitter: Mrs. Cottrell
Psychic Extra: recognized
Photographer: W. Hope (Crewe) Sept 12



Sitter: Mrs. Coupland
Psychic Extra:
Photographer: W. Hope (Crewe) Sept 12



Sitter: Mr. Chapman
Psychic Extra: recognized
Photographer: W. Hope (Crewe) Sept 32



Sitter: Mr. Davies
Psychic Extra:
Photographer: W. Hope (Crewe) Sept 32

The Life of the Soul: A Very Brief History of Spirit Photography

Ever since photography provided a new way of apprehending the visible world there were those who thought it might also prove to be a medium eminently suited to revealing the *invisible* one. **ANDY PACIOREK** picks out some key practitioners from the heyday of spirit photography.

Soon after the dawn of photography, practitioners of the craft began to push the boundaries of the new art form; photographers were not simply content to capture the likenesses of the living, and a whole industry of post-mortem photography grew up. However, some wanted to do more than just harvest images of the empty corporeal vessels of the recently deceased and wished to capture the soul itself on photographic plates. While there is a long history of mysterious images apparently depicting ghosts caught accidentally on camera, there was also a growing number of photographers who actively sought to capture spirits on film.

For all the believers in spirit photography there are just as many detractors – those who called “Hoax!” and pointed out technical methods of reproducing such seemingly uncanny likenesses. This brief resumé of some of the most notable photographers, who alongside William Hope aimed to show the souls of the dead, is not intended to debate the true nature of the imagery they produced – although it notes the claims made by sceptics – but simply to showcase these beautifully strange pieces of photographic art.

William H Mumler

Considered by some to be the father of Spirit Photography, William H Mumler (1822-1884), was active mainly in New York and Boston. He shot many of his images on the back of another type of shooting: many of his clients had lost loved ones in the American Civil War and hoped to see the fallen again in photographs. The most famous of his many sitters was Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of the assassinated President Abraham Lincoln. It was claimed that Mumler did not know the identity of his sitter, but the infamous spiritual subject also apparent in her portrait was to prove part of Mumler’s downfall. The notorious champion of circuses and sideshows, PT Barnum, testified against Mumler in a court case of 1869, accusing him of fraud, hiring the photographer Abraham Bogardus to create his own photograph depicting the shade of President Lincoln. Though



LEFT: ‘Mary Todd Lincoln with the ghost of her husband’, Abraham Lincoln, William Mumler c. 1869. ABOVE: ‘The Medium Eva C’, Baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, 1912.

Frederick Hudson

Credited with bringing spirit photography to Britain in 1872, Frederick Augustus Hudson (b. 1812) often pictured spirits clothed in ethereal veils of diaphanous ectoplasmic material. This mysterious garb led sceptics to claim that the spectral subjects were deliberately crafted to hide their faces and prohibit further investigation. Hudson was to incur the scrutiny of both famous ‘ghost hunter’ Harry Price and his fellow Spiritualist William Henry Harrison. Following accusations that Hudson had used some means of deception, a schism between Hudsonites and Anti-Hudsonites developed in some Spiritualist circles.

Baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing

Through his work as a psychotherapist in Germany, employing such techniques

Mumler was actually acquitted of fraud, his reputation was ruined and though continuing to work as a photographer, he no longer sought his subjects among the departed.



ABOVE LEFT: 'Armistice Day,' Ada Emma Deane, 1923. ABOVE RIGHT: 'Miss Houghton and spirit of her aunt', Frederick Hudson, c. 1872.
BELOW: 'Portrait of Amélie Gabrielle Boudet with spirit of husband Allen Kardec', Édouard Isidore Buguet, c. 1874.

as hypnotism, Albert von Schrenck-Notzing (1862-1929) developed a deeper interest in the psyche and the *seelenleben* ('life of the soul'), a subject of much contemplation among *fin de siècle* secession artists such as his associate Albert von Keller. Schrenck-Notzing's research into Spiritualism and psychic phenomena brought him into contact with the medium Marthe Béraud (known as 'Eva C'). It was of this medium that Schrenck-Notzing and his assistant and lover Juliette Bisson took some remarkable and oddly beautiful photographs. In addition to strange faces, some images depicted streams of flowing and sometimes glowing matter that was said to be ectoplasm, the supernatural substance from which spirits are said to manifest (see FT229:35-36). Controversy arose when the Society for Psychical Research claimed that the faces were chewed-up images taken from the French magazine *Le Miroir* – a claim Schrenck-Notzing refuted in his 1923 book *Phenomena of Materialisation*. The accusations that séances conducted by Eva C were compromised by an unusually high incidence of reportedly sexual behaviour (including her stripping for a thorough body examination by Bisson) did not help Schrenck-Notzing's reputation amongst his detractors.

Édouard Isidore Buguet

Édouard Isidore Buguet (1840-1901) was the prime spirit photographer of the French Spiritism movement, founded in the 1850s by Allen Kardec, and his efforts in photography and mediumship gained



many acolytes despite a court trial that found him guilty of fraud. Reportedly fleeing to Belgium to avoid jail, Buguet continued to create striking photographs, which he now claimed depicted illusions rather than manifestations of the deceased. Some followers of Buguet claimed that he had been bribed or otherwise coerced into making a false confession about his imagery, but the sceptic and illusionist Harry Houdini claimed that police had found items in Buguet's studio that clearly indicated charlatanism.

Ada Emma Deane

Despite not taking a spirit photograph until the age of 58, Ada Emma Deane (1862-1957) became one of Britain's leading and busiest spirit photographers. Her most famous and controversial

works were what became known as the 'Armistice Day' series. For several years, beginning in 1921, on the morning of 11 November, Deane would take photographs at the gathering at the Whitechapel Cenotaph to mark the passing of soldiers lost in World War I. Deane's images displayed a swirling mist of disembodied faces swirling around the proceedings. However, in 1924, the *Daily Sketch* claimed that the photograph taken that year did not reveal the likenesses of the fallen dead but actually showed living sportsmen whose faces had been cut out of newspapers. Deane argued against this accusation, stating that if she were going to hoax the pictures she would be unlikely to use such an identifiable source. Whilst she decided never to do another Armistice Day shot, she continued to take spirit photographs for private sitters for years to come and some of her images were held in the collection of Arthur Conan Doyle.

FURTHER READING

Clément Chéroux, et al, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*, Yale University Press, 2004; Martyn Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography*, British Library Publishing Division, 2006; Troy Taylor, *Ghosts by Gaslight*, Whitechapel Productions, 2007. See also Anthony Matt, 'The Perfect Medium', FT205:38-43.

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ABOVE LEFT: Mr Pollard with what appears to be a non-European Extra. ABOVE LEFT: Mrs Calvert with a recognised Extra, her "own boy".

mirrored and has never been read nor the pictures removed from the album. Only two have been removed, those of John Apedaile and his wife Sarah. The reverse of John Apedaile's card, in pencil, states "Church" and the other "2 copies church". It is thought that the others have the signature of the sitter on the reverse, as this procedure is known to have occurred elsewhere.

Each sitter supplied his or her own set of photographic plates. These plates were placed into the wooden holding, signed and loaded into the camera by the sitter. This procedure was observed to prevent the possibility of substitution. Billy Hope was not allowed to touch the plates until the image was fixed, and merely held his hands over the camera in a trance-like state. The photography sessions often took place in the home of one of the sitters and development would take place in the bathroom (if they had one) or kitchen. A black curtain was hung to act as a background for the sittings. This curtain can frequently be seen to have come partly loose or to have fallen off the wall. In some cases, such as the group photographs, the church was itself used for such sessions.

Hope charged four shillings and sixpence a dozen for printed pictures. Sitters could order as many photographs as they wanted, and paid per item. It is thought that sitters ordered copies for themselves and donated copies to the church. The photographs that

have come together to form the album almost certainly were donated from the sitters' own copies. The collective pictures were probably the property of the committee of the church.

The first 29 pictures in the album date from 1930 and are of a deeper sepia than the 61 later pictures, all from 1932, which are lighter in tone. This may be because of the lighting of the room where the photographs were taken, the room in 1932 being that much better illuminated.

The picture of Mr Pollard taken in 1932 shows a non-European face, which was not recognised. This may have been understood at the time as a "spirit guide" or helper; or, if Mr Pollard had a colonial past, was the Psychic Extra perhaps a connection with those days? Non-European faces were known in Hope's work with other churches and individuals.

The photograph of Mrs Slater, Mrs Percy Slater with Miss Slater, November 1930 shows the recognised image of the elder Mrs Slater's husband Joseph Slater. He had died 28 years before the Hope photograph: an image of Slater in life is shown for comparison. Another notable image is that of John Apedaile and Hansen Hey. The two men had known each other for many years and both had shared Spiritualist committee work at regional level. Hey had died in 1920 and Apedaile recognised the portrait in September 1932. Other named relationships

in the photos were those of nephew, son, mother, and husband.

The minute books of the church from 1899-1929 provide a great deal of detail about the lives of the people photographed by Billy Hope. Some members spent their whole lives in the Spiritualist Church. The last known sitter to have had a Psychic Extra in 1932 was Mrs Madge Shaw, who died in 1993. Many of the people photographed were committee members and appeared several times, while some sat only once. These people came together because of a shared belief in the power of spirit to manifest physically in our world in a variety of ways. The records show that this community experienced an extraordinary range of phenomena in the first 30 years of the 20th century.

The Billy Hope 'Psychic Album' provides a unique portrait of a community experiencing a shared supernatural phenomenon, and provides us with their powerful witness statements: what the participants are telling us is that, for them, the spirit photography of Billy Hope was genuine.

Dead Men's Embers is available from snppbooks@gmail.com

• **GERALD O'HARA** was educated at the London School of Economics and is the author of three books. He specialises in the social history of Spiritualism

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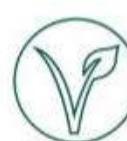
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DR POOLITTLE THE AMAZING ANAL ADVENTURES OF 'DR' HORACE FLETCHER

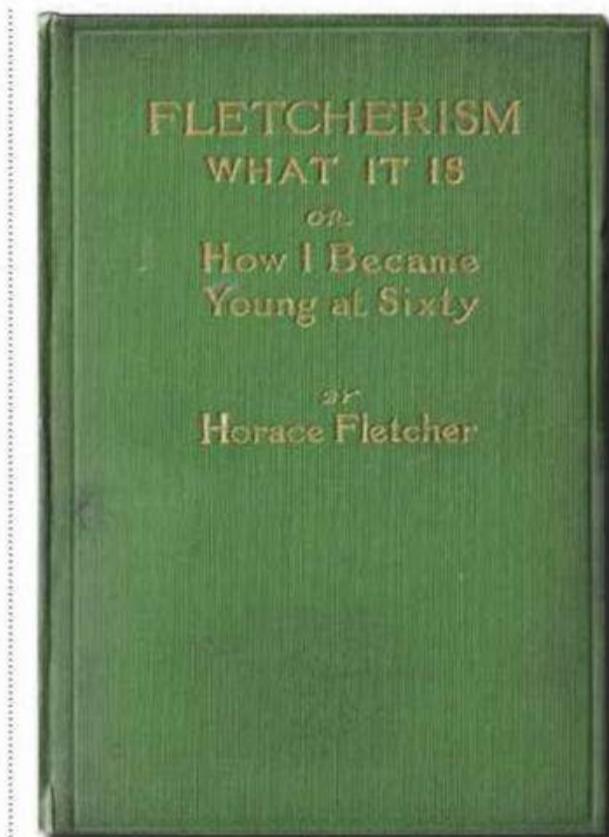
In an extract from his new book *QUACKS!*, SD TUCKER invites you to meet the millionaire 'Great Masticator' who gave the public something new to chew on by promising to turn their turds into 'alimentary dandruff' that smelled like freshly-baked biscuits.

One day in July 1903, an unnamed literary figure locked himself away inside a Washington hotel room in the sole company of an equally anonymous male doctor, where he performed an act so obscene in the eyes of the conservative morality of the day that should either man's identity have been revealed to the world, their lives would have been blighted forever by what was termed "the prudery of a diseased and disgusting age". And yet, what the writer did in his hired bedroom that day was really the most natural act in the world – he had a poo. Into his own hand. And then he sniffed it. And then his doctor sniffed it, too. And they were amazed.

According to both men, the faecal matter in question smelled of biscuits. The medic supervising this act was so impressed that he decided he wanted to see and smell some more. As he later wrote in a detailed report of the whole affair: "During his sojourn in Washington in July 1903, I saw much of Mr —, and in a very intimate way." He did indeed. Washington that July was a "very hot" and "sultry" place, but the poo-producing writer did not let the heat get to him, bashing out some 8,000 words on his typewriter daily, even though his diet during this period consisted entirely of one glass of milk laced with "a trace of coffee" and a few bits of corn-muffin every 24 hours.

RHAPSODY IN POO

And yet the man was not on a diet, precisely – at least not in the modern sense of trying to get beach-body ready. Instead, this was a sophisticated private medical experiment, aimed at demonstrating that if only a "complete assimilation of the ingested material" contained within our meals took place, it would be possible for people to drastically cut down the amount of food they consumed. The proof of this notion,



"Squatting, he passed into his hand the contents of the rectum..."

explained the observing doctor, would not be found only in his abstemious literary friend's continued capacity to tap away at his typewriter for hours on end fuelled by little more than milk, but also in his exceedingly frugal toilet habits.

Impressed by the sweet-smelling nature of the *litterateur's* tiny heap of "digestion-ash", as such superb stool samples were called by those in the know, the doctor

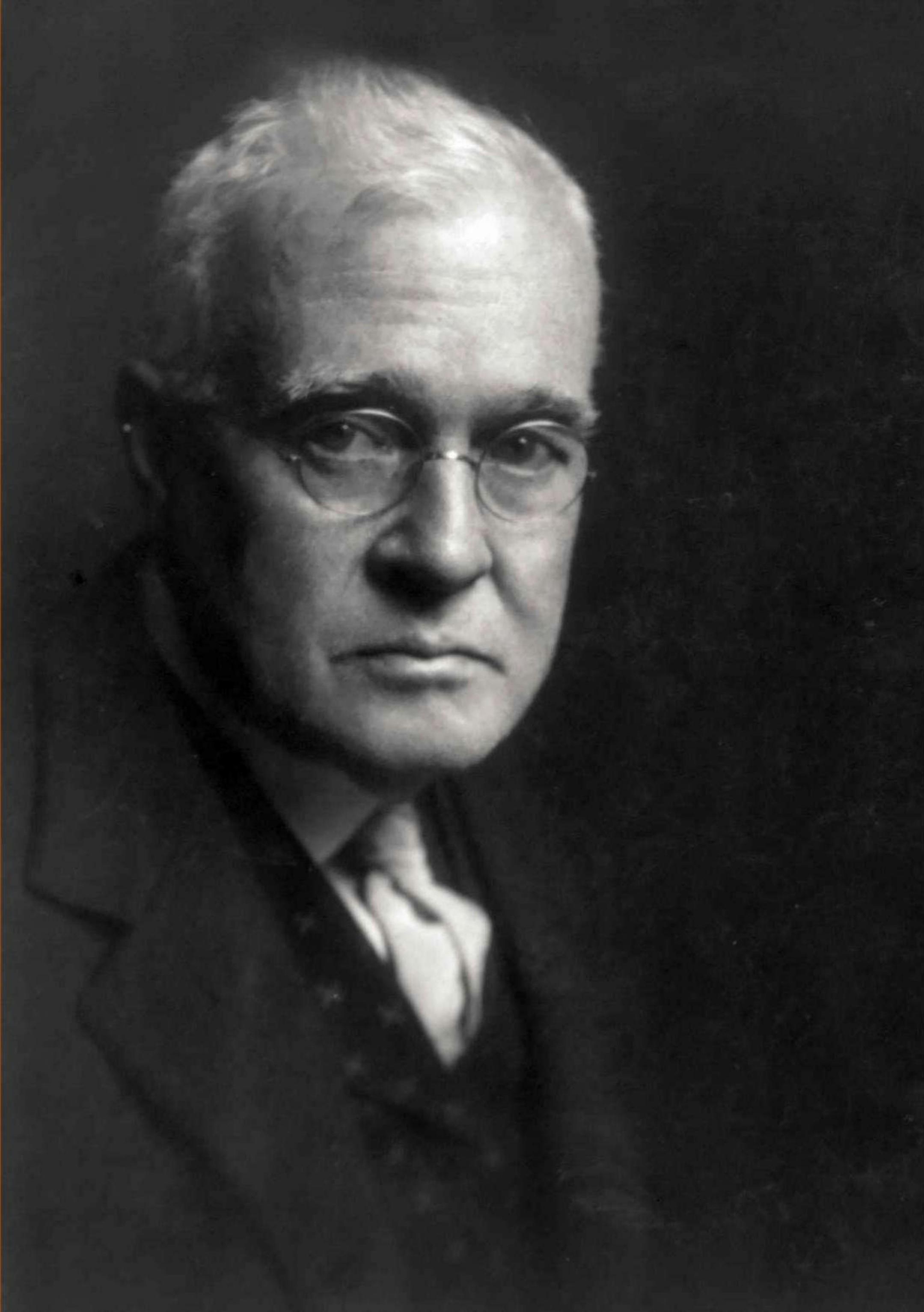
FACING PAGE: Horace Fletcher. LEFT: The chew-chew man's magnum opus.

wrote up a full clinical description of the man's wonderful turds as follows:

There had, under the régime above mentioned, been no evacuation of the bowels for eight days. At the end of this period, [my patient] informed me there were indications that his rectum was about to evacuate, though the material he was sure could not be of a large amount. Squatting upon the floor of the room, without any perceptible effort he passed into the hollow of his hand the contents of the rectum. This was done to demonstrate [its new standard of] human normal cleanliness and inoffensiveness; neither stain nor odour remaining either in the rectum [which the doctor must therefore have sniffed also] or upon the hand. The excreta were in the form of nearly round balls, varying in size from a small marble to a plum. These were greenish-brown in colour, of firm consistence, and covered over with a thin layer of mucus; but there was no more odour to it than there is to a hot biscuit. The whole mass weighed 56 grams.

ASHES FROM ASSES

You can see why the squatting writer chose to remain anonymous. After all, with crap that incredible, he might have received endless burdensome items of faecal fan-mail from impressed members of the public. That was in fact the fate of the figure who ultimately inspired the above daring medical experiment, a rich American gentleman named Horace Fletcher (1849–1919), the most prominent quack-dietician of the early Edwardian era, who was so inordinately proud of the way food passed cleanly and efficiently through his own well-trained colon that, if you wrote off to him requesting one, as doctors and scientists sometimes did, he would gladly send you





ABOVE RIGHT: Horace Fletcher, feeling young at 60 and sporting his all-white suit. **ABOVE LEFT:** Has Horace been banished to a giant naughty step? "The Author Undergoing a Test at Yale When He Made a World's Record on the Irving Fisher Endurance Testing Machine".

a free personal poo sample through the post. Sometimes, he even sent them out unsolicited.

If you were simply an ordinary member of the public and didn't know the address of the grand *palazzo* Fletcher had bought in Venice with the proceeds from his many books and lecture-tours, then never fear. He carried a certain quantity of the contents of his bowels around with him everywhere he went, concealed somewhere within the comical all-white suit he wore to attract attention to his person, and welcomed being approached by people wishing to see, stroke or smell it. Horace Fletcher was perhaps the only man in history to have used the products of his own anus as a form of free advertising.

The level of obsession Horace Fletcher had with his own faeces was truly demented, and he expected his many devoted readers to follow suit, providing them with excessively prescriptive instructions about how often to go to the toilet and what their waste should look like when they had done so. Apparently, it ought to resemble compacted dandruff: "If a microscope is handy for minute inspection, it will be found that most of the excreta is composed of what I think of as the dandruff of the alimentary canal. It is composed of shapeless particles

of skin which have been discarded by the mucous surface of the canal in the same manner that dead skin is being continually detached from the head and all parts of the external surface of the body."

In other words, your turd itself would become a kind of rectal scrubbing brush, meaning that, by the time the poo drops down into your toilet, it will have gathered up substantial quantities of anal dandruff, or dead colon-skin, around its body, in the same way that a snowball gets larger when you roll it about in the snow. Except that this 'dandruff', of course, would not be white. It would, though, be very sterile, and very infrequently produced. Indeed, it would not really be poo at all, but a kind of beautiful, compressed bum-ash:

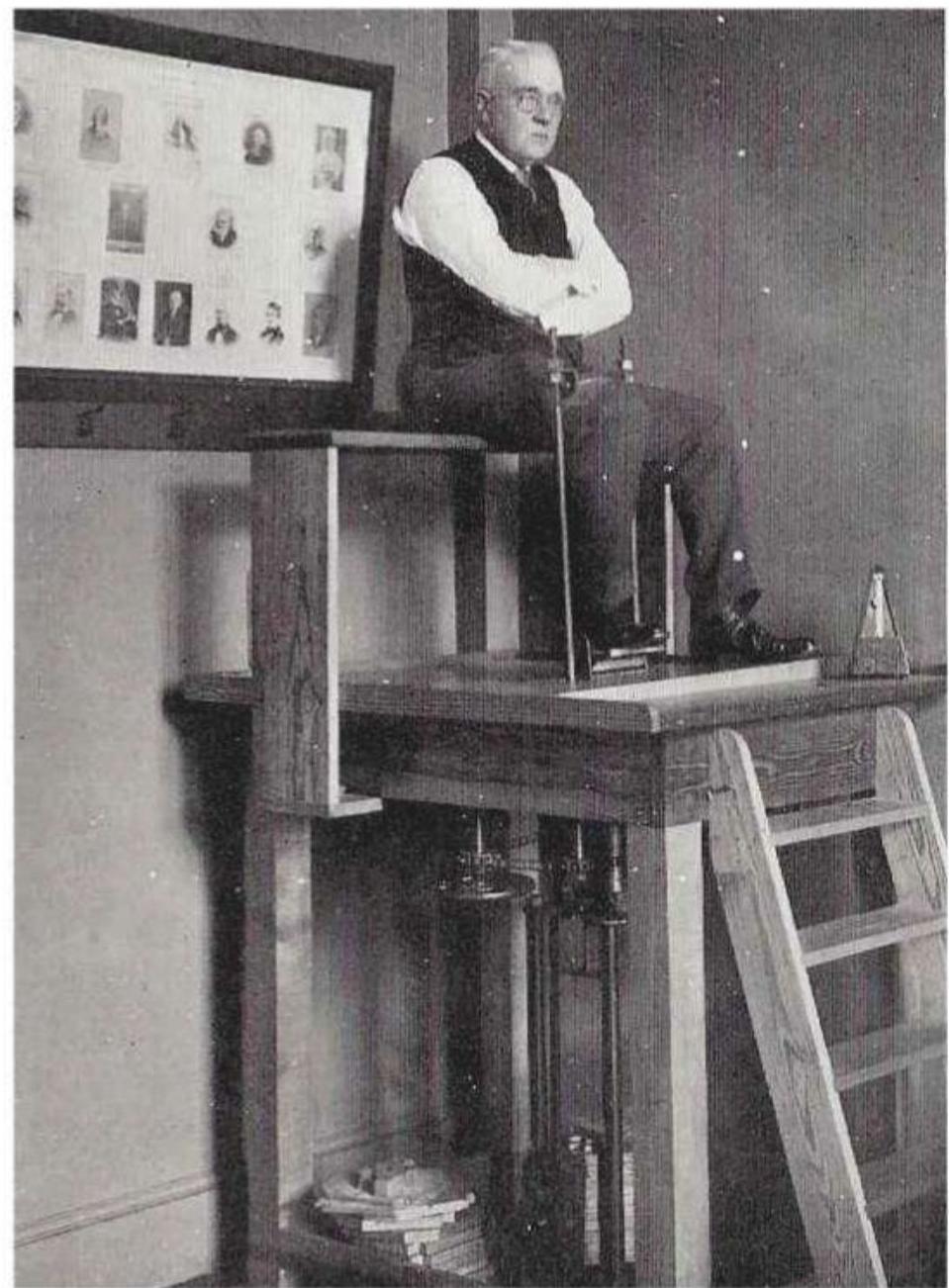
[My] economic digestion-ash forms in pillular shape, and when released these are massed together, having become so bunched by considerable retention in the rectum. There is no stench, no evidence of putrid bacterial decomposition, only the odour of warmth, like warm earth or hot biscuit. Test samples of [my] excreta, kept for more than five years, remain inoffensive, dry up, gradually disintegrate, and are then lost... Under the best test-conditions... the ash accumulated is sufficient [in] quantity to demand release only at the end of six, eight or 10 days, the longer

periods of [anal] rest being the evidence of the best health.

CHEW-CHEW TRAINING

How did this toilet-obsessed quack manage to produce so little faeces, so lovely in form? The answer lies in the fact that Horace Fletcher was a compulsive chewer, both in public and in private. Indeed, he openly referred to himself as being 'The Great Masticator', and came up with the memorable slogan "Nature Will Castigate Those Who Fail to Masticate".

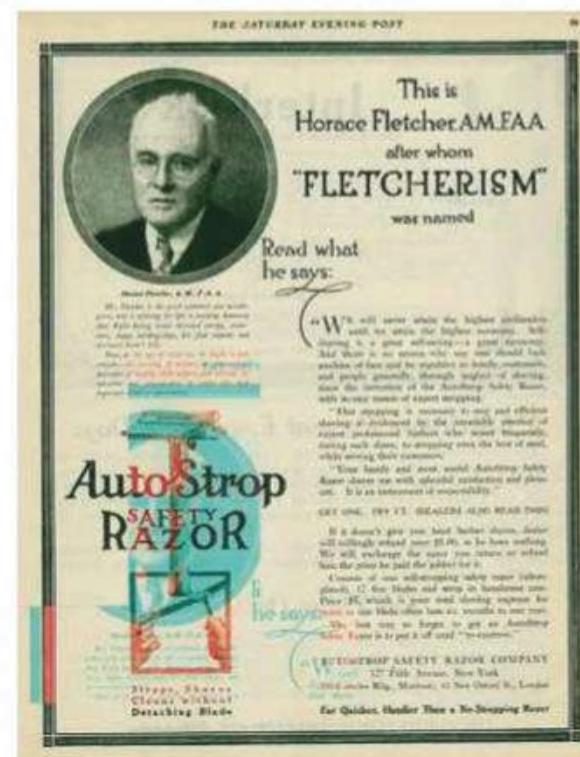
Yes, Horace Fletcher's big diet rule, the one which apparently earned him millions of dollars, was the simple advice, given to us all in childhood, that we should always chew our food properly before swallowing. This incredible 'insight' made Fletcher rich and famous beyond his wildest dreams, thus proving once and for all that you really can polish a turd. Even worse, he stole the idea from someone else. By rights, a large proportion of Fletcher's royalties should have gone to the worm-nibbled corpse of Britain's great Victorian Prime Minister WE Gladstone (1809–1898), who had famously recommended to his grandchildren that, when eating meals, they should chew each mouthful of food 32 times, "one for every tooth".



The other big problem with Fletcher's plan was that it didn't really amount to much. The basic statement "Chew your food properly, get nice poo" could fit on a postage-stamp, and Fletcher had a wide range of 200-page books which needed filling if he was to make any money. His solution was to produce reams and reams of incredibly repetitive verbiage, interspersed with dull anecdotes about some of his favourite meals and most enjoyable bowel movements, and several statements that veered totally off-topic, sometimes into very strange regions indeed.

Consider his frankly inexplicable musings upon the subject of cannibalism, both human-on-human and interspecies (you'd think 'interspecies cannibalism' would be a contradiction in terms, but not to Horace). Fletcher did not actively recommend cannibalism, he just said that it did no real harm – even if the person you were cannibalising was yourself. The ways of the stomach were indeed wonderful, allowing consumption of human flesh as "an emergency expedient" if necessary. The walls of our stomach, Fletcher said, are made of meat and therefore: "Should we ever turn into cannibals, devouring each other as the Pacific Islanders used to treat missionaries... the stomach walls become tripe and are easily digestible... It is physiologically possible to cut out a part of the whole of our own stomach and then devour and digest it as tripe in the small intestines."

While we should only resort to cannibalism "in cases of emergency", it was nonetheless wise to make some kind of pact with either a loved one or a pet to the effect that, should famine strike, you would attempt to eat one



another simultaneously in as public-spirited a fashion as was possible. This is a genuine passage from one of Fletcher's books – dog-lovers stop reading now:

I have the acquaintance of a collie dog [called Bruce] whom I love devotedly; and I say "whom" appropriately because he is as intelligent as I am [this is in fact highly plausible] ... He is a real gentleman at all times and as good a Fletcherite [i.e. good chewer] when the food substance and occasion demand as I am. He has learned to eat and enjoy apples and no one could give more careful mouth-treatment to some sorts of food than Bruce. I am sure that he would want me to eat him if I needed him to preserve my life... Nature permits Bruce and me to eat each other, and if we managed it skilfully we could attack each

other's extremities at the same time, as long as we did not encroach on our vital machinery, and really eat each other up, as young lovers would like to do.

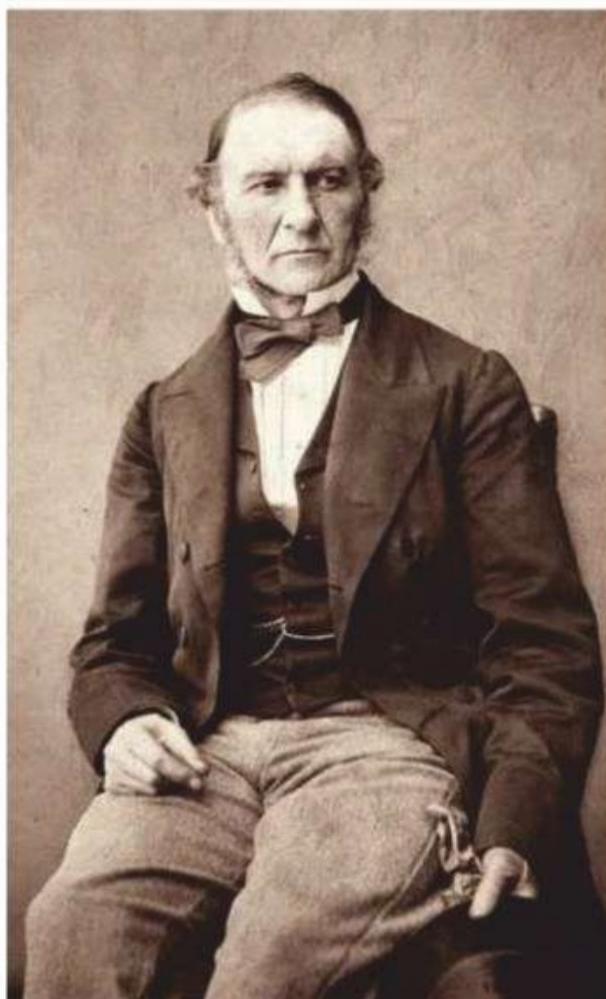
By giving up his fingers to Bruce as a string of living sausages, Fletcher could let his dog live to bark another day. Then, Fletcher could bite off his dog's tail and suck it dry of protein, in return. Just so long as these extremities were chewed properly, whilst thinking positive thoughts, there was nothing wrong with this scenario at all, said the chew-chew guru.

THE TELL-TALE FART

Amongst the many truly fascinating food-related anecdotes contained within Fletcher's books, meanwhile, was the unforgettable two-page story of how he once ate "a fat, rich ham sandwich, a glass of milk and a hexagonal segment of a mince pie" at a railway station in Mobile, Alabama, and an unnecessarily extended account of his consumption of a part of a shallot one day, which came to achieve classic status amongst his fans:

Some morsels of food will not resist 32 mastacations, while others will defy 700. The author has found that one-fifth of an ounce of the midway section of the garden young onion, sometimes called "Shallotte", has required 722 mastacations before disappearing through involuntary swallowing. After the tussle, however, the young onion left no odour upon the breath and joined the happy family [of food] in the stomach as if it had been of corn-starch softness and consistency.

It has since been reliably calculated that Fletcher's consumption of this single small



ABOVE LEFT: British Prime Minister William Gladstone, who famously recommended to his grandchildren that they chew every mouthful of food 32 times.
ABOVE RIGHT: The doctrine of Fletcherism reaches England in a 1909 issue of *The Strand Magazine*. TOP: Fletcher endorses the Autostrop Safety Razor.

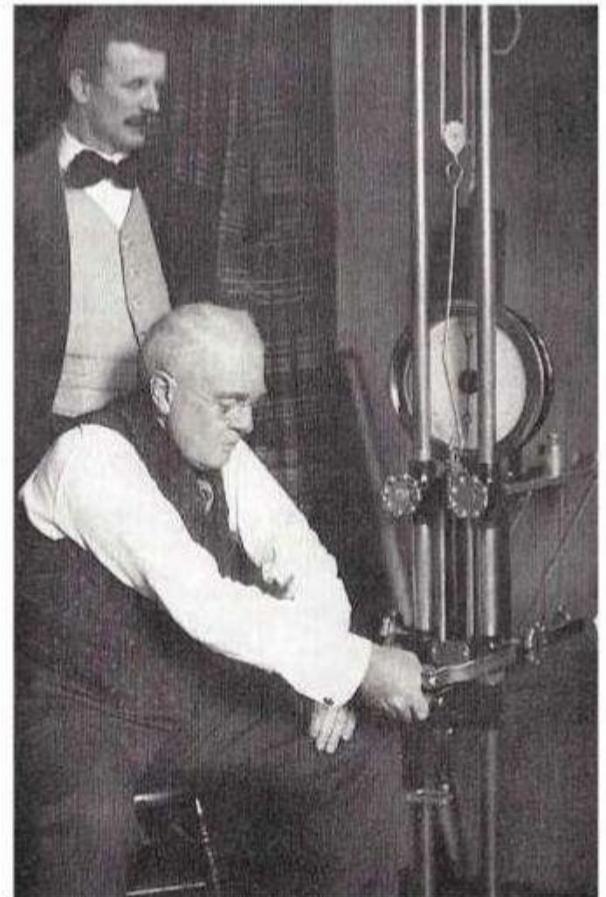
How I made myself YOUNG at SIXTY by Horace Fletcher

"Fletcherism," the system of feeding which has met with such astounding success in America, is here explained by the inventor for the benefit of British readers.

["Fletcherism" has become a fact. Ten years ago it was laughed at; to-day the most famous men of science endorse it and teach its principles. Scientific leaders at Cambridge, the University of Turin, the University of Berne, the University de la Sorbonne, the Universities at Berlin, Brussels, and St. Petersburg, as well as Harvard, Yale, and Johns Hopkins Universities in America—all endorse "Fletcherism" and teach its principles. The American Association for the Advancement of Science has made Mr. Fletcher a Fellow. It has been estimated already that more than two hundred thousand families in America are living according to "Fletcherism." It is no longer a question of doubt that of all the many current movements for sane eating and living Mr. Fletcher and his principles have emerged at the very front. In the following article Mr. Fletcher for the first time tells in print the full story of the discovery of his principles and how he rescued himself from the prospect of an early grave to his present splendid physical and mental condition at the age of sixty.]

DWENTY years ago, at forty years of age, my hair was white, I weighed two hundred and seventeen pounds (about fifty pounds more than I should for my height of five feet six inches), every six months or so I had a bad attack of "influenza," I was harrowed by

that I finally found a clue to the solution of my health disabilities. A faint suggestion of possibilities of arrest of decline had dawned upon me in the city of Galveston, Texas, some years before, and had been strengthened by a visit to an Epicurean philosopher who had a snipe estate among the marshlands of Southern Louisiana and a truffle preserve



ABOVE LEFT: "The Author, on his Sixtieth Birthday, Performing Feats of Agility and Strength which Would Be Remarkable Even in a Young Athlete". ABOVE LEFT: "The Author Testing His Endurance by Means of the Kellogg Mercurial Dynamometer". BELOW: More cross-promotion: "Shredded Wheat induces Fletcherism".

segment of onion will have taken him 10 full minutes. How long to eat the whole onion, then? An hour? Two hours? Three? Maybe he thought it was a savoury gobstopper.

Horace's output was a form of verbal Fletcherism in and of itself; taking a tiny shallot of wisdom and stretching it thin to last beyond all normal bounds of reason. Particularly useful when stringing out Fletcher's texts were his repeated claims that chewing your food properly not only improved your faeces, it also made you into a better person. As little as "one week of earnest, open-minded" chewing, he claimed, was enough to "convert a pitiable glutton" into a veritable anal saint. A healthy diet meant healthy turds, and healthy turds were the sign of a healthy mind and soul: "It is not that which goeth into a man that defileth him but that which cometh out," as the Gospel has it.

"With foul odour there is disturbance, strain and danger," Fletcher claimed. If your shit smelled bad, and did not "drop freely from the exit, leaving nothing behind to wash or wipe away", then this was a matter for moral condemnation as well as medical. Not by their words but by their turds will men be judged.

If thorough mastication was a moral enterprise, then it consequently followed that bad chewing was nothing but "indecency", and bad farts little more than wanton nose-rape. "Can one think of anything more indecent than offensive odours which are the inevitable tell-tale of indecent eating?" Fletcher asked. If the human soul really resided within the stomach rather than the heart or brain, as certain classical authors thought, then a loud, smelly trump had all kinds of ominous moral implications.

Following a speech he gave to the New York Academy of Medicine concerning his new doctrine of 'Dietetic Righteousness', Fletcher was approached by an outraged medic accusing him of bum-blasphemy. Naturally, Fletcher let rip and responded with a powerfully offensive blast of his own:

'By George!' I replied, in righteous indignation, 'Is there anything more sacred than serving faithfully at the altar of our Holy Efficiency [of defecation]? Is there any righteousness more respectable than that which furnishes fuel for healthy efficiency and moral stability?' And the question may now be repeated: 'Is there?'

Well, is there? Apparently not. Fletcherites, Horace began to proclaim,

would be at a distinct advantage when, after death, they reached the Pearly Gates to be given a quick sniff over by St Peter:

The faithful one [i.e. Fletcherite] is ever ready to go before the bar of Death's Tribunal for the approving judgement his dietetic righteousness is sure to secure. Good circles of healthy cause and effect have been swirling about in the organism as the result of faithful decent eating, and Nature's God never fails to perpetuate the evolution of the Good.

In Heaven, all farts will surely smell of warm biscuits. To Fletcher, cleanliness (at least of the anus) really was next to godliness, with the soul being indeed the sum of its farts.

Amazingly, he was not the only one who thought this way. JH Kellogg, inventor of the corn flake, was one of Horace's chief anal allies (although cracks later began to show in their relationship), who, as he grew older, began adopting several of Fletcher's key doctrines, and even started dressing like him, in a silly white suit. Kellogg even began openly criticising God Almighty because the Deity, being incorporeal, could never have a satisfying dump. When questioned about his beliefs by an appalled Seventh Day Adventist, Kellogg produced an argument against the Almighty so deranged that not even Richard Dawkins has yet seen fit to try it:

'Is God a man with two arms and legs like me?' Kellogg demanded. 'Does he have eyes, a head? Does he have bowels? Does he defecate?'

'No,' the Adventist answered, deeply offended.

'Well I do!' cried Kellogg, 'And that makes me more wonderful than God is!'

Horace Fletcher, too, viewed himself as a kind of god in human form – that god being Adonis, as we shall now see.

IT AIN'T WHAT YOU CHEW, IT'S THE WAY THAT YOU CHEW IT

Horace's fullest delineation of his theories appeared in 1913's *Fletcherism: What It Is, Or, How I Became Young at Sixty*, which laid out how he came to discover the cult of chewing in the first place. Aged 40, said Fletcher, he was a wreck of a man, old before his time, with white hair, regular bouts of disease and lethargy, and so overweight that he was turned down for a life insurance policy. Not wishing to have to retire immediately and live out his final few days on a reinforced deckchair, Horace vowed to try every diet and fitness regime going in an attempt to "keep on the face of the Earth for a few more years".

One of the ideas Fletcher tested was Gladstone's recommendation to chew your food well. To Horace's surprise, it worked. Within a mere five months of learning how to chew properly, all the poo-badness had been flushed from his body: "My head was clear, my body felt springy, I had not had a single cold for five months, that tired feeling was gone!" Also, he had lost over 60lb (27kg) of fat. By chewing his food fully whilst thinking positive thoughts, Fletcher had become a new man. And yet this had all been done using his mouth and brain, both of which, he noticed, were located in his head, not in his stomach or bottom. By 1913, 15 years of constant "devotion to the study of the head-end question" had led Horace to arrive at an extraordinary conclusion:

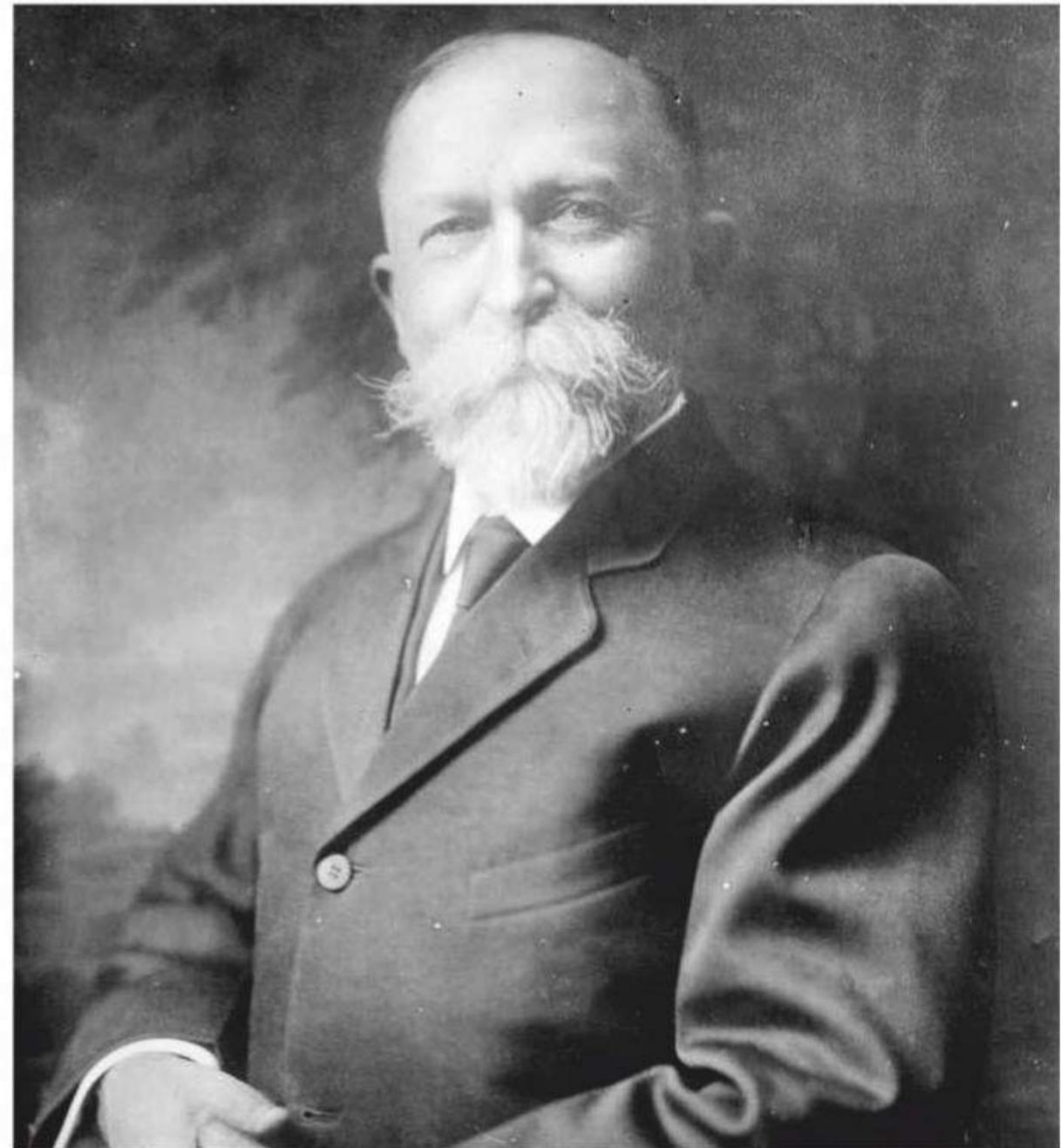
Everybody had supposed that the digestion of food was effected only in the stomach and small intestines. This is true, in a narrow sense, but it can be arrested and completely stopped by the head [i.e. by not chewing properly and thinking negative thoughts] ... Here is a physiological eye-opener... If the head can make digestion easy or stop it altogether, the stomach being a subservient, mechanical and chemical servant of the head in the matter, we may properly declare that the master-key of digestion is held by the head, and we may safely say that there is 'Head Digestion'.

Head Digestion! Of course, the stomach was simply a small detail. Digesting your food head-first would mean "emancipation from most of the human disabilities" if widely adopted, said Fletcher, so diners should be encouraged to "be as nearly like a little animal as possible, thinking nothing of anything" while eating their food, like a small puppy gnawing a bone.

An alternative way to prevent indigestion may have been to undergo a lobotomy:

Some observers declare that idiots digest their food quite easily. The less mental clarity they possess, the better for their metabolism... The idiot is a sensualist, and in his relief from mental excitement finds enjoyment of taste and the satisfaction of appetite as agreeable as do the animals under similar favourable conditions.

So, if you want to fully digest a cabbage, why not become one? It worked for Horace Fletcher.



ABOVE: John Harvey Kellogg, inventor of corn flakes. He created the cereal for the patients of the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan where he was superintendent. BELOW: A 1919 advert for corn flakes.

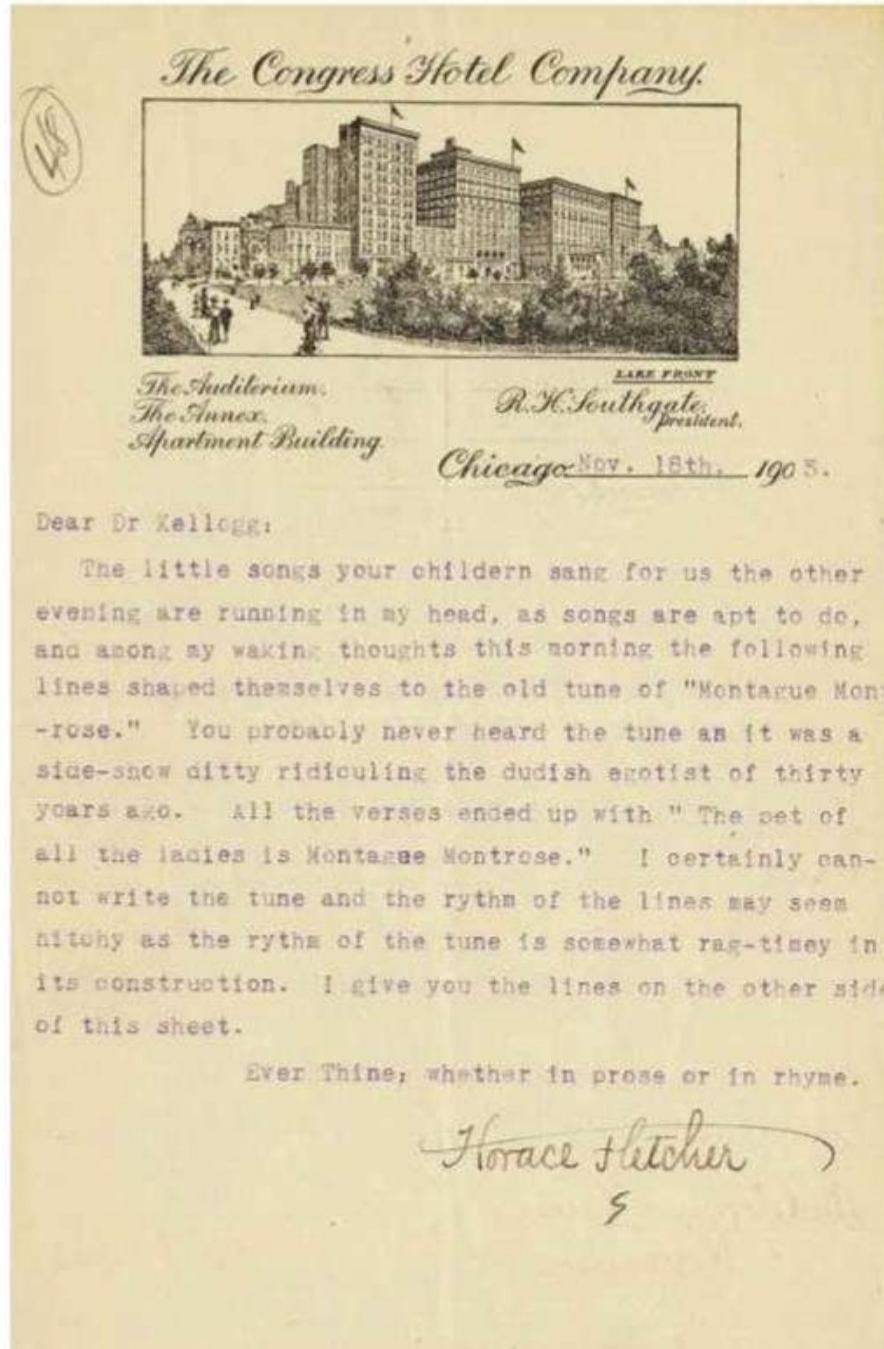
"Some observers declare that idiots digest their food quite easily..."



MASTICATION ON THE MARCH

Once he had mastered control of "the laboratory of the mouth", Horace Fletcher began trying to impress friends and strangers alike by performing random athletic feats without any warning. For example, whenever near the coast or a large body of water, whether at home or abroad, he liked to jump aboard ships and then jump off them again whilst turning somersaults in order "to impress the natives". Some of his books contain photos of Fletcher performing such daredevil acts, to prove to his readers how nimble he had become.

The idea that chewing his food well had transformed Fletcher into a super-being won a surprising amount of support from the medical establishment of his day, leading many to erroneously conclude that he himself was a qualified medic. In 1900, Fletcher travelled to Europe, staying in a Vienna hotel and befriending the in-house doctor, Ernest van Someren. Really, van Someren was more interested in Fletcher's stepdaughter, whom he later married, but Horace nonetheless managed to persuade him of the merits of mastication. Van Someren wrote up Fletcher's work in a more scientific manner, presenting papers



ABOVE: In 1903, Fletcher wrote to his friend JH Kellogg, of Corn Flakes fame, after being inspired by the latter's children to try his hand at song-writing. Lyrics such as "I choose to chew, because I wish to do / The sort of thing that Nature had in view" suggest that Irving Berlin and Ira Gershwin had little to fear.

to august bodies like the British Medical Council. By 1904, Fletcherism was actually being endorsed as a sensible idea in the pages of Britain's leading medical journal, *The Lancet*. Having "captured" van Someren and transformed him into his own personal "megaphone", Fletcher's mode of mastication was on the march.

Hailed a hero by Europe's dieters, Fletcher returned to America, heading towards the laboratories of the Yale University physiologist Russell H Chittenden. Initially sceptical, Chittenden set Horace all kinds of tests involving the physical training apparatus used by Yale's college athletes. Although Fletcher had not embarked upon any prior programme of training, he rapidly set about beating all the previous records set upon these devices by men who were several decades his junior – or so it is alleged. By now in his late 50s, Fletcher managed to lift a 300lb (136kg) weight some 350 times with his leg, thus doubling the previous record of 175 hauls. He claimed he could have performed more, but "I had doubled the record, and that seemed sufficient for a starter."

Ruthlessly exploiting such supposed feats for publicity purposes, Fletcher

became the most famous quack of the age, with celebrity fans ranging from William and Henry James to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – and even, it is said, King Edward VII. 'Luncheon Muncheons' became popular events, where diners vied to see how long they could take to eat a single mouthful of food; 'Kindergartens of Chewing' were set up in Fletcher's name, inside which tiny tots were fed propaganda about their anal health; and murderers applied for early release from prison on the grounds that Fletcherising their food behind bars had rendered them morally safe to re-join mainstream society. The armies of Britain, France and the USA even performed experiments in getting their troops to chew after Horace's fine fashion, to transform them into a race of clean-bummed military super-men.

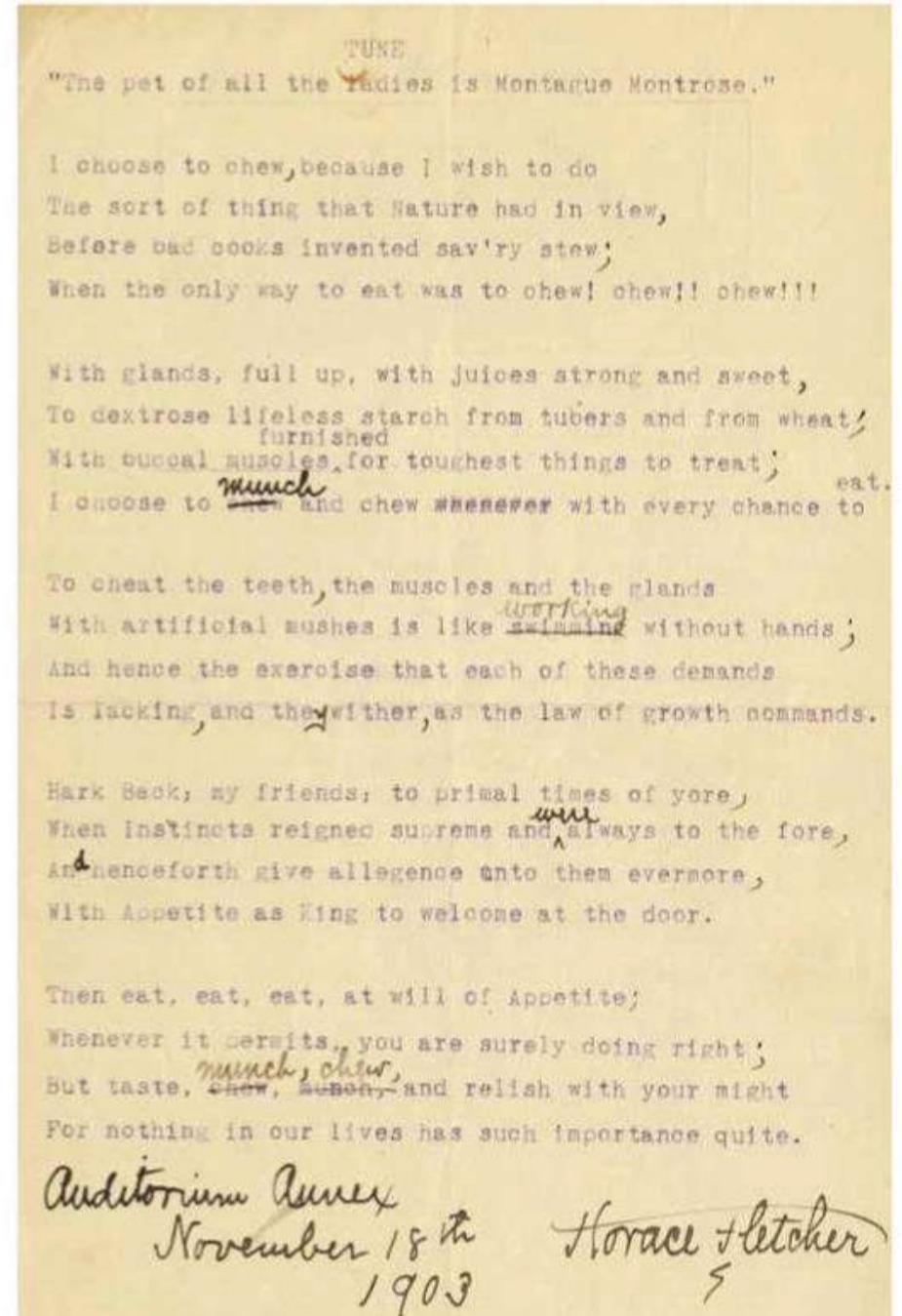
However, following World War I, the tide began to turn. A sceptical report from the US Department of Agriculture demonstrated that, no matter how long you chewed them, you could only ever extract 3.6 calories per gram of Kellogg's Cornflakes. Disagreeing, Fletcher sent the government scientist who had performed these calculations one of his very finest turds in an envelope via first-

class mail, begging him to reconsider, but the boffin refused to budge. Fletcherism quickly passed out of fashion following its progenitor's death from bronchitis in January 1919, as advances in nutritional science, like the novel concept of the calorie, appeared to prove that Fletcher was actually talking through his arse.

Such proofs could not simply be dispelled by putting a postal stamp on a particularly attractive stool and sending it off to an expert for perusal, and before the 1920s had ended the chew-chew cult was utterly forgotten – an abysmal piece of pseudo-scientific quackery which crumbled away like an old heap of Fletcherite digestion-ash before being flushed away forever down the u-bend of medical history.

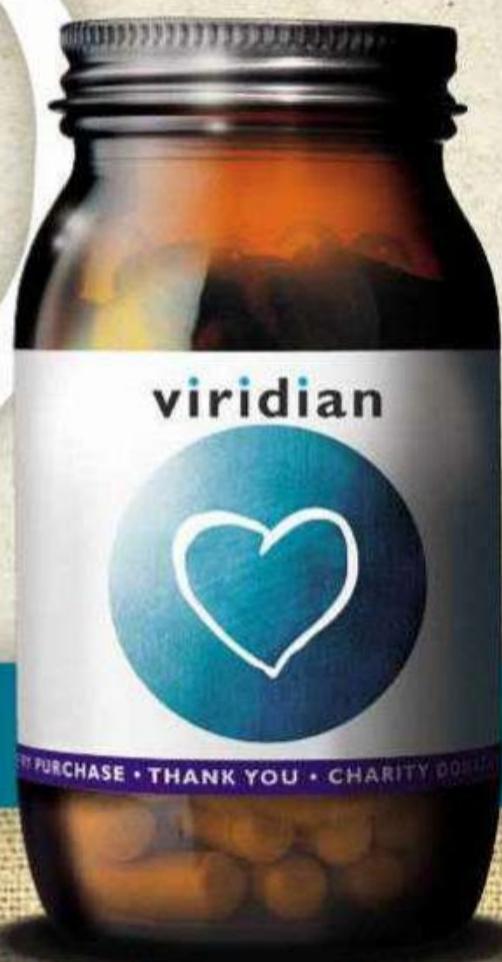
This article is extracted and condensed from *QUACKS! Dodgy Doctors and Foolish Fads Throughout History* by SD Tucker, available from Amberley Publishing, £14.99, ISBN: 9781445671819)

SD TUCKER writes regularly for FT and is the author of *Space Oddities, Forgotten Science, Great British Eccentrics, The Hidden Folk, Terror of the Tokoloshe, Paranormal Merseyside* and *False Economies*.



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THE LAST WOLF IN ENGLAND

When did the last wild wolf on English soil meet its death? And where? JOHN REPPION finds plenty of contenders – as well as out-of-place modern examples, whether natural escapees or supernatural interlopers – and asks whether it's time to reintroduce our apex predator...

The month which we now call January our Saxon ancestors called wolf-monat, to wit, wolf-month, because people are wont always in that month to be in more danger to be devoured of wolves, than in any else season of the year; for that, through the extremity of cold and snow, these ravenous creatures could not find of other beasts sufficient to feed upon.

So wrote the antiquary Richard Verstegan in his *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities*, published in 1673. The official wolf-hunting season in Britain once ran between late December and late March, but by all accounts, the beasts were more often than not killed whenever the opportunity arose. Indeed, wolves seem to have been hunted in the British Isles for as long as they and humans co-existed, but exactly when that period came to an end is a matter of some debate.

Legend has it that the last Welsh wolf was killed near a place called Coed y Bleiddiau ("Wood of the Wolves"), close to the village of Maentwrog in what is now Snowdonia National Park, in the early decades of the 16th century. The last wolf in Scotland is recorded as having been killed nearly 200 years later in 1680 by the Highland Chief Sir Ewan Cameron of Lochiel in a gorge near the village of Killiecrankie. A stuffed and mounted specimen purported to be this very wolf was sold at auction in 1818, but seems more likely to have actually been a tamed specimen belonging to the English collector Sir Ashton Lever (1729-1788). Scottish folklore states that the legendary Highland deer-stalker MacQueen of Pall a' Chrocain actually slew the last Scots wolf in Darnaway Forest in Morayshire in 1743. The story goes that MacQueen was sent for by the Laird of Macintosh to help track a "black beast" which had attacked and killed two children. A gathering of men, including the Laird, awaited MacQueen's arrival the



ABOVE: The tame wolf kept by the 18th century English collector Sir Ashton Lever.

*The story goes
that a 'black
beast' had killed
two children*

following morning, eager to discuss details, and set out to put an end to the depredations of the murderous creature. When MacQueen arrived late he was asked what had caused his delay. He responded by throwing the bloody, severed head of a black wolf into the centre of the gathering.

Across the sea in Ireland the last official record of a wolf being killed dates from 1786 in County Carlow, Leinster. However, Charles Fort recorded in *Lo!* that in 1874 sheep were being killed on an almost nightly basis in and around Cavan, in the border region of the Republic of Ireland. These attacks lasted for four months and the way in which the animals were killed – their throats torn out – led many to assert that a wolf was responsible. We are told that Archdeacon Magenniss eventually shot the beast at Lismoreville (a place I can find no other record of) in April of the year, and that it was found to be nothing but a large dog gone feral. Fort found this a rather neat yet unsatisfactory conclusion to the tale of the last wolf in Ireland, as do I. What then of the last of the English wolves?



ABOVE: A contemporary postcard commemorating the exploits of the Allendale (or Hexham) wolf and its demise; the date does not quite tally with accounts of the dead wolf's discovery a few days later. BELOW: The Allen Valleys Folk Festival includes the burning of a wooden sculpture representing the Allendale Wolf.

THE WOLF OF ALLENDALE AND OTHERS

In volume two of his 1865 work *Popular Romances of the West of England*, the scientist and antiquarian Robert Hunt recorded the following:

The extirpation of the wolves, which once existed in every part of these islands, is an oft-told story. But it is not generally known that the last native wolf lived in the forests of Ludgvan, near Penzance. The last of his race was a gigantic specimen, and terrible was the havoc made by him on the flocks. Tradition tells us that at last he carried off a child. This could not be endured, so the peasantry all turned out, and this famous wolf was captured at Rospeith, the name of a farm still existing in Ludgvan.

Ludgvan is in Cornwall, although no date is given for the death of this particular last English wolf – but not to worry, there are a few others. Quite a few, in fact. In the village of Wormhill in Derbyshire stands Wormhill Hall, built in 1697. Local legend says that the site of the hall marks the spot where the last wolf in England was slain, at some unspecified point in the 15th century. Humphrey Head is a limestone outcrop situated between the villages of Allithwaite and Flookburgh in modern day Cumbria. Here, the story goes, the last wolf in England was killed after a long pursuit along the shore by the son of notorious



wolf-hater Sir Edgar Harrington. Again, this tale takes place “sometime” in the 15th century. Stittenham Wood in North Yorkshire is another candidate, as is Wolfsrag, West Chiltington, Sussex, although its name and those of the nearby Great Den, Little Den, and Far Den fields are thought by many to be the source rather than the result of the tale. Writing in 1801, the antiquary Joseph Strutt gave the following summation of the likely era of the English wolf’s demise:

It seems most probable that wolves became extinct in England during the reign of Henry VII or at all events they were exceedingly rare after that reign. The Lancashire forests of Blackburnshire and Bowland, the wilder parts of the Derbyshire Peak and the wolds of Yorkshire were among the last retreats of the wolf. It has been confidently stated that entries of payments for the destruction of wolves in the account books of certain parishes of the East Riding presumably of the sixteenth or seventeenth century date are still extant, but this appears to be an error.

Nevertheless, wolves have been sighted, and even killed, in the fields and forests of England long after Henry VII was dead and buried.

Returning to Lo!, we find a story from 1904 in which sheep were being slain nightly in Hexhamshire, Northumberland. That December, local newspaper the *Hexham Courant* bore the headline “Wolf at large in Allendale”. A four-and-a-half-month-old wolf belonging to Captain Bains of Shotley Bridge, about 15 miles (24km) away from the town of Hexham, had escaped in October and was believed to be the animal responsible (see FT192:40-42). Locals formed the Hexham Wolf Committee, offering a reward for killing the animal and hunting for it themselves in mobs of up to 200 men armed with guns. The committee utilised hunting dogs, even a specially drafted in

bloodhound called Monarch, and a “skilled Indian Game Hunter” named Mr W Briddick. The wolf was sighted on a number of occasions, and though many of the reports seemed contradictory, they agreed that this was a large and formidable beast. By this time, the story had been taken up by the London newspapers and become something of a sensation. The attacks on livestock continued throughout December but the wolf could simply not be caught. Then, in January 1905, the body of a wolf was found on a railway line in Cumwinton, Cumbria, 30 miles (48km) west of Hexhamshire. Captain Bains was summoned to the scene but immediately stated that the corpse was not that of the young wolf he had lost. The *Hexham Courant* reported on 7 January that the wolf found at Cumwinton was not the Wolf of Allendale and that the beast was still at large. The conclusion drawn by many was that there must be a whole pack of wolves roaming the region. On 21 January the newspaper reported that the destruction of livestock was still taking place. A wolf had been seen once again by several witnesses, including a postman, and the Hexham Wolf Committee continued its hunts. No second wolf was ever captured or killed, however, and soon the sightings and attacks petered out.

STILL ON THE PROWL

Captive wolves are still escaping into the wild, even in the 21st century. In 2009, a wolf chewed through the metal fence of its enclosure at Combe Martin Wildlife Park, Devon, only to be recaptured roaming the perimeter soon after. In November 2013, a pack of five wolves escaped from Colchester Zoo in Essex, again by gnawing through a metal fence. One of the wolves returned to the enclosure of its own volition and

a second was successfully tranquillised, but the remaining three escaped the zoo completely. Two were shot dead within hours, but the third remained on the loose for nine hours. Locals were told to keep children indoors as armed police searched the nearby countryside for the animal, which was eventually also shot and killed. Just like the Wolf of Allendale before them, there are other beasts roaming England’s green and pleasant lands whose origins remain far more mysterious than those of these unfortunate escapees.

Cannock Chase is an area of countryside and dense woodland in Staffordshire, West Midlands, and is reportedly home to a wolf, or “wolf-like creature”. On 10 February 2010, the *Birmingham Mail* ran a story headlined “Further sighting of mysterious Cannock Chase Wolf”: “Sightings of a wolf-like creature over Cannock Chase have continued to flood in, with eyewitnesses claiming to have seen the fabled beast near to Huntington woodland.”

Mark Sutton, walking in the area, was reported as saying: “I was walking my dog near to Broadhurst Green and I believe I saw something that could be described as a wolf. It was not a panther and it was too large to be a dog. It was walking through the bushes without a care in the world.”

“Sightings of a wolf-like creature have continued to flood in...”



ABOVE: A wolf stands guard over the Crown on a roundabout in Bury St Edmunds. Legend has it that a fearsome wolf guarded the severed head of St Edmund the Martyr after his murder in the ninth century.

Another local, Peter Derbyshire, also gave an account of a recent sighting: “I was driving through the trees in the direction of Stafford when I saw something dark moving amongst the bushes on the right hand side of the car... It was definitely not a cat, it had more of a dog’s characteristics. It had a long nose and sharp, pointy ears.”

The reason both witnesses mention big cats is that the Cannock Chase Wolf would appear to be the cryptid formerly known as the Cannock Chase Panther, aka the Cannock Chase Beast. Indeed, Black Dogs, Alien Big Cats, UFOs, Black Eyed Children, Slenderman himself, and many more [let’s not forget Pig-man – Ed; see FT306:70-72] have all been spotted in and around Cannock Chase, which is considered something of a paranormal hotspot. The fact that both men described the creature as wolf-like rather than actually a wolf may also have a bearing on the 1975 sightings of a wolf in the area, which, when startled, is said to have risen up on its hind legs before running away on two feet rather than four. Are the Cannock Chase Panther, the Cannock Chase Were-Wolf and the Cannock Chase Wolf the same creature? Certainly, it might go some way towards easing the supernatural overcrowding in the area.

Hexham too, it should be noted, has also had its fair share of extra-lupine weirdness. In 1971 brothers Colin and Leslie Robson were digging in the back garden of their home in the village, some 10 minutes walk away from the woods where the Allendale Wolf once roamed. The boys found a pair of small stone heads, each about 6cm (2.3in) high, buried in the earth. After taking the heads into their home, the Robinson family reported strange phenomena – poltergeist-like activity and the heads themselves shifting from one location to another. The Hexham Heads became a media sensation. No one could agree how old they were or even exactly what they were, despite thorough examinations by numerous experts, but the general consensus (in the press at least) was that they were almost certainly cursed. One of the experts who examined the heads was Dr Anne Ross, a Celtic scholar best known for her books *The Pagan Celts* and *Pagan Celtic Britain*. While in possession of the heads Dr Ross, who believed them to be Celtic ritual objects, was visited in her Southampton home by a strange creature which was also seen by her daughter Berenice. The being was described as being half man, half wolf. All this came to a rather unsatisfactory conclusion when a man by the name of Desmond Craigie, who had lived in the house in Hexham prior to the Robinsons, came forward and said that he had made the heads himself for his daughter to play with during the 1950s. He ever went so far as to create other heads to demonstrate the technique, though some remained stubbornly unconvincing (for more on the Hexham Heads case, see FT15:5, 59:43, 217:74, 220:74, 294:42-47, 295:44-49).



MATT CARDY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE RIGHT: Two young male wolves look out from their enclosure at The Wild Place Project in Bristol – but are we ready to let them run wild again in the British Isles?

REWILDING THE ISLES

Escaped zoo animals and shape-shifting supernatural entities notwithstanding, is there really any chance of our ever again seeing wolves in the wild in Great Britain? Some say it is possible. Rewilding Britain (www.rewildingbritain.org.uk) is a charity organisation set up in 2015, and their website says: "We believe rewilding provides hope for the future for people and nature. Through rewilding we can start to reverse centuries of ecological damage. We can re-establish natural processes, reconnect with nature and regain wonder for the natural world."

The list of fauna which Rewilding Britain proposes reintroducing includes beaver, wild boar, elk, bison, lynx, and, yes, wolf: "Wolves live in a huge range of habitats and human population densities. They present a very low risk to people. Wolves have re-established themselves across most countries in Europe. They are a tourist draw despite being shy creatures that avoid people where possible. They suffer from many centuries of demonisation and mythmaking. No reintroduction would be attempted without widespread public consent and enthusiasm."

The Wolves and Humans Foundation (www.wolvesandhumans.org) is another UK based charity organisation, officially registered in 2013. The foundation works towards the conservation of wolves (and other species) across Europe but, like Rewilding Britain, is also campaigning for the reintroduction of wolves, specifically in Scotland: "Reintroducing the wolf to the Scottish Highlands was first proposed in the late 1960s, but the idea only started to gain wider publicity and support following the reintroductions of the red wolf to the south-eastern United States in 1989, and the grey wolf to Yellowstone National Park

in 1995."

The Highlands are now widely considered to be the only place in the British Isles where wolves might practically be reintroduced. Primarily, wolf packs would serve as a means of managing the red deer population (currently kept in check by culling) with secondary benefits including natural reforestation as a result of decreased deer numbers, increased movement of the herds, and a growth in tourism. There are still many obstacles to be overcome, not least of which is the fact that the "widespread public consent and enthusiasm" Rewilding Britain feel is necessary has not been entirely forthcoming. The National Farmers Union for Scotland have said they are wholly opposed to the reintroduction, and residents of the Scottish countryside surveyed have generally not shown much enthusiasm for the idea (scoring an average of +2 on a scale of -18 to +18). Even those in favour of the reintroduction, including leading British broadcasters and naturalists Sir David Attenborough and Chris Packham, acknowledge that there is a fair way to go before such an idea could ever be realised.

Wolves were once the apex predator in Great Britain, posing a direct threat to the lives of our ancestors. They became the archetypal enemy, yet at the same time they were viewed as our equals. Their strength, their cunning, their sheer power was admired, even coveted, just as much as it was feared. Legend says that when Edmund the Martyr, King of East Anglia and first patron saint of England, was murdered by Northlanders in the ninth century, a great wolf guarded his severed head until it could be found and reunited with his body. Wolves represent something primal, something primitive, but also

something pure. There is an argument that there is great collective guilt for the eradication of the wolf from the British Isles; that on some level we still feel the loss of this singular species, which kept pace with our own for so many millennia. Their ghosts still haunt our unconscious minds and we see them – sometimes as wolves, sometimes as Black Dogs or werewolves – running through the shadows in what remains of the wilderness. In truth, though the last wolf in England never died, we did something much more human to it than that, something which began some 15,000 years ago. We remoulded the wolf in our own image; we took the wild primal beast of the forest and we fed it, we tamed it, we gave it a name. Five centuries after the last wolf in England was supposedly slain, its pocket-sized, flat-nosed, bug-eyed descendants peer out from handbags, or squat awkwardly on bare concrete while their attached humans stand dutifully by, plastic poo bags in hand. Grey wolves – real wolves – still roam the forests and plains of vast swathes of Europe, Asia, and North America: powerful, intelligent, social animals, hunting, living and travelling in packs made up of their own families, just as humans did before we discovered farming, 11,000 or so years ago. Perhaps then, if our collective conscience is what is behind a desire to reintroduce the wolf to this island, it is due not so much to the guilt of having eradicated them, but for what we have become in their absence.

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- ◆ JOHN REPPION is a writer of comics, weird fiction and fortean essays based in Liverpool. His latest work includes *Conspiracy of Ravens* (Dark Horse/Penguin Random House, 2018), a family-friendly graphic novel about a team of British schoolgirls blessed with folkloric magical powers.

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What is UFO Research?

The field may have been transformed by technology in recent years, says **NIGEL WATSON**, but the key issue remains one of quality rather than quantity of research

What constitutes UFO research? Is it spending all night on Cradle Hill, Warminster, watching the heavens with an array of hi-tech telescopes and recording equipment? Interviewing and hypnotising UFO witnesses? Analysing UFO statistics? Compiling lists and catalogues of UFO data? Writing reports and books on the subject? Some take the view that those who go out skywatching and visiting UFO witnesses are the true researchers, whilst those who just study the data are simply armchair ufologists who do not have the right to comment unless they have been 'out there' or have experienced a UFO encounter themselves.

A further offshoot of the armchair ufologist brigade are the Internet and social media ufologists whose research consists of looking at NASA images and spotting alien artefacts on Mars or UFOs darting around the International Space Station. At best, they write blogs and produce websites; at worst they just repost UFO stories on the likes of Twitter and Facebook. These have replaced the old and beloved print magazines that were turned out on mimeograph machines and other equally ancient forms of long-gone printing technology.

At this juncture, I will admit to posting links to newspaper stories or reviews on my 'UFO Investigations Manual' and 'UFOs of the First World War' Facebook pages; and what I have found is that the most absurd or extreme stories reach thousands of people whereas more sensible



LEFT: Pascagoula abductee Charles Hickson was interviewed by Dr J Allen Hynek.

(Flying Disk Press, 2018) he and Hickson had a meeting with Dr James Harder, a professor at the University of California, and Dr J Allen Hynek, chairman at the Department of Astronomy at Northwestern University, just two days after their encounter. This took place in a conference room at Walker's Shipyard, where Hickson and Parker worked.

The researchers did not mess about, as Parker recalls: "The first thing they wanted to do was to hypnotize us in order to try and get more details about our experience on the river."

It was explained to them that hypnosis might make them feel less anxious and might relieve Hickson of a headache he was complaining about. Although they had not gathered much new information, Harder and Hynek were interviewed by newspaper reporters that evening. Hynek said that: "...there is no question in my mind that these men have had a terrifying experience. Under no circumstances should they be ridiculed."

Harder, a consultant for the Aerial Phenomenon Research Organisation (APRO), believed it was "an entirely real experience that they had. There is no room for ridicule in this case." He did not think that Hickson or Parker had suffered an hallucination and added that: "There was definitely something here that was not terrestrial... Where they came from or why they are here is a matter of conjecture but the fact that they are here (on this planet) is true beyond a reasonable doubt."

A more detailed interview session was conducted on the morning of Sunday 14 October. Hickson and Parker remained

or scholarly postings find greater approval but get far fewer viewings. Nonetheless, this new medium does allow for the quick dissemination of information and analysis, as well as being a place for fierce in-fighting and sometimes intemperate arguments.

Then there are the (minor) celebrity UFO researchers who attend all the conferences, write books, and by some unwritten rule appear on every TV documentary on the subject; due to all this public exposure, they are widely regarded as experts.

As far as I'm concerned, any of these areas of UFO research are perfectly legitimate, and the issue is more about quality than quantity. Some ufologists brag that they have 'investigated' hundreds of cases or have seen/photographed hundreds of UFOs. Unfortunately, these investigations often amount to little more than a few cursory notes, while the photographs are of out-of-focus seagulls (oops, I mean ET spacecraft zipping across the sky).

A case in point is the investigation of the abduction of Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker by two mummy-like aliens in Pascagoula, Mississippi, on 11 October 1973. According to Parker in his book *Pascagoula: The Closest Encounter – My Story*

dubious and frightened about being hypnotised, and when it came to recalling the abduction under hypnosis they both went into 'panic mode' and were immediately taken out of the trance. And that is as far as the Harder/Hynek investigation went: a quick weekend visit and a write-up in *APRO Bulletin* (September/October 1973).

Like other famous cases, there is no single comprehensive report, but instead a mishmash of site visits, interviews, hypnotic and lie detector sessions, articles, books and media coverage. Also, the passage of time often distorts memories and the manner the story is presented in the media.

In recent years, UFO investigations have often been put aside in favour of putting pressure on governments to release their UFO files. Despite the vast number of documents made public, the vast majority of them do not consist of in-depth investigations or 'smoking gun' evidence of the collection of ET craft or bodies.

We now have far better resources and technology to research the UFO phenomena, yet as the late, great (armchair) UFO researcher Peter Rogerson noted in the *Merseyside UFO Bulletin* (vo 5, no 2, May 1972), recognition of the subject "will only become respectable to the scientific community if research and speculation are conducted in a scientific manner; and that speculation is limited to scientifically valid notions. One must accept that this speculation will be ultimately futile if the phenomena are not comprehensible in terms of 20th century science. The tendency of writers to throw scientific restraint away and invent ever more fantastic pseudo-scientific cosmoes can only be deplored."

• **NIGEL WATSON** is a regular contributor to FT and the author of *UFOs of the First World War* and *The UFO Investigations Manual*.

Abducting the Alt-Right

MJ BANIAS explains why White Supremacists are using UFOs to promote racial purity.

A little over a year ago, the *New York Times* ran an article breaking the story that the Pentagon was funding a \$22 million dollar programme to investigate UFOs and other phenomena (see FT363:28). Meanwhile, Sony Pictures is filming a re-telling of the Rendlesham UFO incident starring Laurence Fishburne, and the History Channel's 10-part mini-series, *Project Blue Book*, starring Aiden Gillen as Dr J Allen Hynek, is set for release very soon. UFOs, culturally speaking, seem to be enjoying a renaissance, a resurgence in popularity both in entertainment media and the news.

All very exciting – but flying saucers have a dark side too. While UFOs have typically been linked to folkloric desires for a progressive social programme, environmentalism, equality, and technological salvation, UFO discourse has also been home to extreme nationalism, neo-Nazism, and white supremacism. While mainstream news media tend to write off UFOs, the alternative media, particularly those outlets targeting alt-right markets, may be using them to gain followers.

Dr Greg Eghigian, Professor of History at Penn State University, explains that German sociological studies have been done on contemporary neo-Nazism in Europe, and that historical links between the paranormal, neo-Nazism, and contemporary European white supremacist movements can be traced back to the 1950s.¹ Supporters of the Third Reich deliberately circulated rumours that Hitler had survived, and that he, along with teams of scientists, was building advanced flying saucer-style aircraft. According



MR_T_77 / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: The Nazi UFO mythos, in model form at the Roswell UFO Museum. BELOW: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

to Eghigian: “The UFO sightings of the late-40s and early-50s were, they contended, sightings of these new aircraft as they were being tested by Hitler’s team. All this was a prelude to an eventual military attack by Hitler on the victorious Allies and the resurrection of the Third Reich.”

For contemporary neo-Nazi groups in Europe, the subject of UFOs is a popular recruiting tool. Eghigian pointed out that, “the interest in UFOs is, more often than not, simply a function of neo-Nazis attempting to find a pop culture medium that can be used to get their message out to young people.”

Globally, many individuals within UFO subcultures are politically and socially left-leaning. However, aliens have been abducting the alt-right for over a century. The very myths, folktales and pseudoscience from which the UFO narrative emerges often form the same narrative that leads to belief in white superiority. The very historical forces which drive white supremacist beliefs concerning a ‘master race’ are rooted deep in ufological history as well, going back to 19th century esotericism and occultism.

In 1859, when Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, Europe underwent a cultural

For neo-Nazi groups, UFOs are a popular recruiting tool

shift. While Darwin himself remained relatively quiet on human evolution, his supporters and students pressed on; but for many, the notion that the culturally and racially superior European man was descended from African monkeys was a little too much to handle.

Enter Russian-German aristocrat, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. After a series of alleged telepathic communications from disembodied ancient “Masters,” she created Theosophy, which, according to her, attempted to bridge Spiritualism and science (see FT302:32-37). While critics called her a charlatan, as she never provided a single shred of evidence for her claims, her followers, in part, were reacting to the new shift in thinking put forward by Darwin’s supporters. Theosophy was the foundation upon

which contemporary New Age movements rest. Hinging upon the theological and cultural appropriation of Eastern philosophies, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, Blavatsky tossed in some convenient counters to Darwinian evolution. In *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) she asserts that higher beings, some of whom came from other planets, created several “root races.” The most enlightened and intelligent race are what she called “Aryans”. While Blavatsky did not invent the term, it was relatively new in the English language of the late 19th century. Borrowed from the Sanskrit word, “arya”, which translates as noble, respectful, and honourable, the term reflected Europe’s colonialist attitude, and the notion that Western civilisation was superior. Blavatsky wrote: “Mankind is obviously divided into god-informed men and lower human creatures. The intellectual difference between the Aryan and other civilised nations and such savages as the South Sea Islanders, is inexplicable on any other grounds...”²

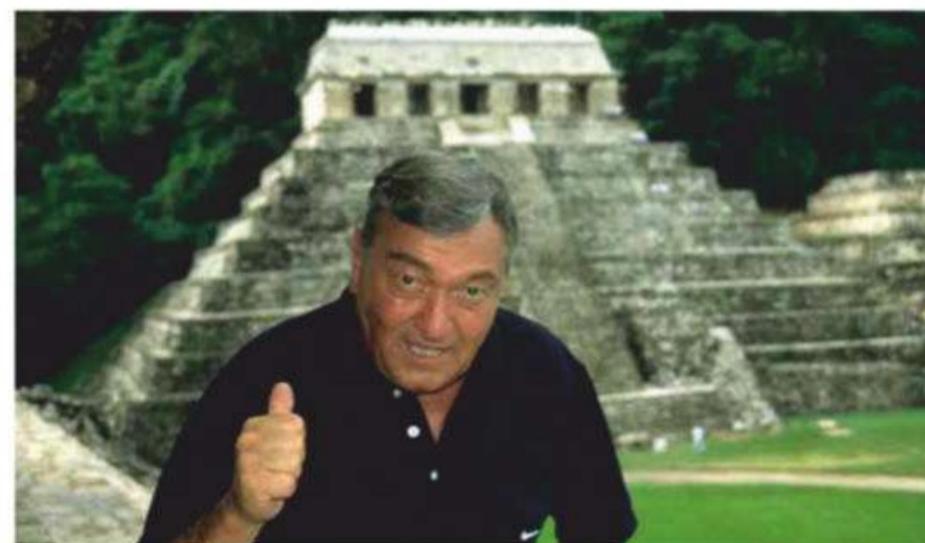
While contemporary Theosophists and New Age gurus have softened the racial aspects of their collective histories,





Blavatsky's esoteric influence remains potent in the US. With notions of machine learning, genetic manipulation, and sloppy quantum theory, it has taken on an illusory air of science. At times, even History Channel's *Ancient Aliens*, now in its 13th season, uses a disguised modern ideological re-tooling of Blavatsky's race theory from a contemporary Western perspective. Picking up on familiar claims of extraterrestrial intervention, the programme suggests that ancient Africans did not build the pyramids and that the ancient Aztecs were unable to create complex cities and social systems on their own. Since we in the West have no idea how it was done, it must have been the aliens! As palaeontology professor Dr Julien Benoit points out, there seems to be no question in the minds of Westerners that mediæval Europeans built complex cathedrals using only "ropes, sticks and wood," yet in the same breath they dismiss the "scientific research that overwhelmingly proves ancient Africans' prowess" in using "rope, sticks and wood" was what allowed them to achieve their massive engineering feats.

Benoit argues that this branch of pseudo-archaeology and revisionist history stems from "profound racism and a feeling of white superiority that emanates from the rotting corpse of colonialism."³ Today's UFO research communities are not immune to such thinking. Erich von Däniken, author of the famous *Chariots of the Gods* (1968), and a regular guest on *Ancient Aliens*, reinforced Blavatsky's ideology. In his 1981 book, *Signs of the Gods* (1981), he wrote: "Was the black race a failure and did the extraterrestrials change the genetic code by gene surgery and then programme a white or yellow race? ... I am in complete agreement with the racial theorists; there was only the black race, which took its colour from the apes. But the change from black to white could not have been made with one mutation; it would need an endless chain of mutations. How does a new



LEFT: See that pyramid? That was aliens, mate. Erich tells it like he sees it.

species appear, when only one is in existence? How could a washproof black become a white without interbreeding between two races?"⁴

This pseudoscientific thinking is at the core of both white supremacist discourse and contemporary ufology. When John Ventre, a state director of the world's largest UFO reporting centre, the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), made racist comments about African Americans on his Facebook page⁵ and stated that white Americans were suffering "a white genocide," the head of the organisation initially defended him. MUFON eventually removed Ventre from his post and explained that he would no longer be volunteering for the organisation, although he still does run conferences for MUFON in Pennsylvania.

Wealthy New Age "channeller" JZ Knight has made several racist comments directed at various groups. In one video, which was uploaded to YouTube and since removed, standing before hundreds of her followers, she was quoted as saying: "Fuck God's chosen people! I think they have earned enough cash to have paid their way out of the goddamned gas chambers by now..."⁶

In March 2017, New Age streaming TV service, Gaia, ran into trouble when its senior content director and "alternative archaeologist" Jay Weidner, went on a white nationalist radio show hosted by Jeff Rense and stated that African and Indigenous groups all had low IQs due to "inbreeding". He also stated that a "civil war"

was brewing in America, and that the "Lib-tards" were going to lose.⁷ After the airing of this interview, Gaia continued to have Weidner appear on programmes, including George Noorey's *Beyond Belief*. According to their chief marketing officer, Weidner is retired, and Gaia "does not endorse any sort of racism whatsoever". They did not comment as to whether Weidner was forced to retire due to his racist beliefs, nor did they comment on his appearing on their programming after his appearance on Rense's programme. Since his retirement, Weidner has appeared twice on Jimmy Church's *Fade to Black*, and once on *Coast 2 Coast AM* in June 2018, with Church as host.

As more profiling is done on members of contemporary white supremacist movements, the evidence seems to point to the fact that members of these groups begin as disenfranchised and anxious, in search of a feeling of belonging. Similarly, like the gods of any religion, the figure of the alien, strange as it may seem, provides stability against constant change for many within UFO communities. For both ufological and racist subcultures, the alien becomes an "unchanging Other". For faithful UFO believers, it can serve as a saviour for humanity's ills; for alt-right groups, it can mimic the ideal racial purity, intellect, and technological ability they desire.

My concern is that a similar historical and cultural background has generated both UFO and white supremacist folklore. This issue goes beyond

the individual believer and into the core ideologies that frame the entire UFO movement. As UFO themed conferences, television shows, films and documentaries continue to gain in popularity, writing off UFO subcultures as the lunatic fringe is dangerous. Polls indicate that over 50 per cent of Americans believe that UFOs are real⁸ and that aliens are visiting Earth. When half of a population believes something, and American senators can allocate millions in taxpayer funds to investigate extraterrestrial craft, we had all better pay attention. We must begin to explore how certain groups, particularly those that make up the alt-right, use this contemporary folklore to galvanise their ideologies and potentially gain new followers.

NOTES

1 See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*, NYU Press, 2003.

2 HP Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Cambridge University Press, 2011 edition, p.421.

3 <https://theconversation.com/racism-is-behind-outlandish-theories-about-africas-ancient-architecture-83898>.

4 Erich von Däniken, *Signs of the Gods*, Berkley Publishing, 1981, p.70.

5 www.newsweek.com/ufo-sightings-mufon-2018-john-ventre-alien-extraterrestrial-905060

6 www.alternet.org/belief/ramtha-new-age-cult-leader-unleashes-drunken-racist-homophobic-rants-large-following

7 The interview has been removed from YouTube and other locations. Thanks to the diligence of Chris Zuger of "Den of Lore" podcast, a copy has been preserved at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RqPp8HzT57ZwX8lgfHQ4meSajuKEedpZ/view>

8 www.ipos.com/en-us/americans-pass-judgment-plausibility-ufos-extraterrestrial-visits-and-life-itself

➲ MJ BANIAS is an educator, writer and blogger, and was a former field investigator with the Mutual UFO Network and *The UFO People: A Curious Culture*, will be released in 2019.

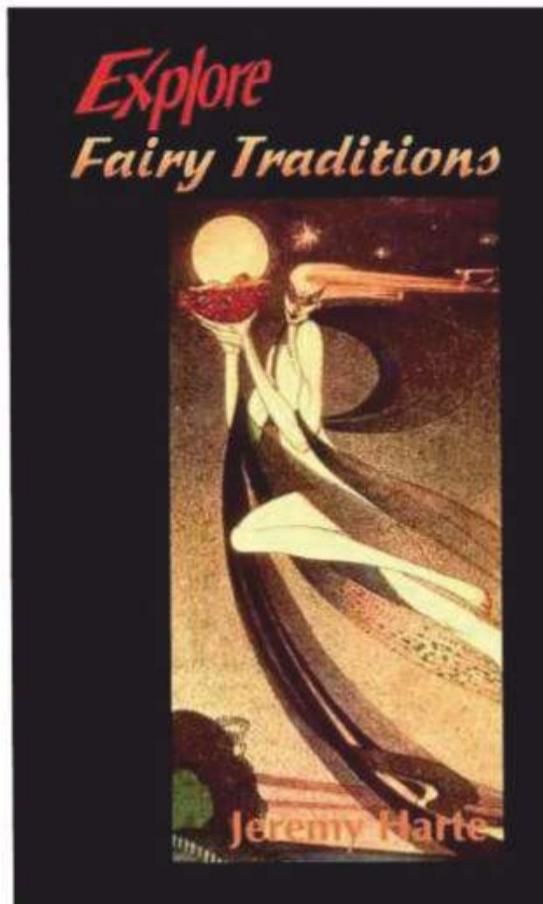
THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

41. TINKERBELL HAS TEETH AND CLAWS

Don't be taken in too far by the headline. Tinkerbell, as originally envisaged by JM Barrie, was not exactly the sugar-and-spice-and-all-things-nice sprite of the Disney version. Tinkerbell's rages, mischief-making and compulsive waywardness suggest that Barrie knew a bit more about real fairies than he was prepared to let on. However: this isn't an essay about Tinkerbell, in any of her incarnations – an exercise for another day, perhaps – but a commendation of a book about actual fairies and, what makes it so excellent, about what they meant to people familiar with them. It's a short and pithy book, written out of enormous erudition, and thus richer on every page than many another longer, more watery work.

The first third of Jeremy Harte's *Explore Fairy Traditions* treats fairies as phenomena. This is by no means the same, but certainly runs parallel to, the great catalogues of fairy lore such as Katherine Briggs's. The 50-odd page introduction asks all the pertinent scene-setting questions: Who are the fairies? Are fairies real? Who told the first stories? How were the stories told? Where do fairies come from? Is there an explanation for fairies? How do people learn about fairies? Where are fairies found? Answers to which could have made a respectable book on their own, but Harte doesn't want to stop there, and nor should any enquiring mind. This is still useful, corrective porridge, since it gives us a history and typology of fairies, in their many and disparate reported manifestations. But it is still essentially background, since the description and provenance of various *kinds* of fairy doesn't include the experience of encountering them, its context, and its significance. These are separate if entangled things; catalogues and folklorists' motif numbers (how Teutonic they are!) do not answer or explain their intricacies – they do not 'speak to the condition' of those who have engaged with fairies. And Harte makes a crucial point as early as his third page: Briggs, he says, "created a kind of template for subsequent publications" and these remind us "of those splendid Guides to British Birds" with one page per species, so that "after scanning one of these volumes" (the ones about fairies) "the reader will have no difficulty telling a boggart from a buggane, if you should come across one, which you won't. Fairies may be real, but they are not real in such a literal-minded way."



How real are fairies, or in what way are they real? Like unicorns and flying saucers and bigfoot, they are real enough for people to behave as if they were (or are) real, if steeped long and deep enough in the lore. Sometimes with horrific consequences. Harte tells how in 1895, 26-year-old Bridget Cleary of Tipperary fell ill, and her husband Michael became convinced that the fairies had taken her and left this sickly imitation in her place. He held the 'changeling' to the fire and "threw a jug of piss over her" and stuffed a herbal concoction down her throat. She persisted in insisting that she *was* the real Bridget, so (in front of witnesses), he stuck a burning stick in her mouth. Her clothes caught fire; he reacted by chucking

paraffin on her; and so she burned to death. Michael dumped her body in a peat bog, where it was found – plainly the fairies had taken no interest in *that* – and in due course Michael Cleary went down for 20 years for manslaughter. It would have been murder, and presumably the gallows, but for the Clonmel court taking into consideration his profound belief in the ways of the fairies. There is, as you may imagine, much more to the case, which is worth looking up: note Angela Bourke's *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, and there is some good stuff on the Web. Fairies may or may not be 'real', but in such cases they may as well be.

Where do tales about fairies come from? That depends on the tale. Some can be traced from their probable geographic origins, although it's not always clear if one started at point A and ended up as far away as point B, or vice-versa. In other cases, the tales are so widespread (and so old) it's impossible to tell where they might have arisen. Harte is not convinced that their plots are in some sense hard-wired into the human brain and surface by themselves at all ends of the Earth. 'How the stories were told' isn't an exercise in discovering what kind of fire the tales were told around, but a tactful indication that we mostly know fairy stories through the lens of scholarship, and in some cases through artful fabricators such as Ruth 'Chime Child' Tongue. Harte recognises implicitly that the most authentic tales come through folk ballads or direct (and usually rather old, as well as rare) transcriptions. Harte's brief chapter on the origins of fairies is an elaboration on this truth: "So... a belief in fairies contains something of the old gods; but it also derives from every other figure in the web of story – from saints, ancestors, fiends, heroes, ghosts, familiars, vampires, angels, and anything else that is possible to be imagined." So the short answer is, 'the imagination'. As it is, in a sense, the crude answer to all these questions. But Harte dutifully covers this ground with all its pitfalls and dead ends and rich stories, whose roots run from madness to wisdom, in order to get to the heart of his interest, and show how it ought to be ours as well: "the metaphorical sense of fairy legend".

It's not the business of legend, myth, symbol or metaphor to explain anything, but rather to provide a blurry medium through which to reflect upon life's conundrums and ambiguities, or even its 'little ironies' as Thomas Hardy put it, not without ambiguity. Consider the Welsh Lady of the Lake cluster of tales. Briefly: by solving a riddle, a shepherd manages to win a maiden who habitually emerges from the waters of Llyn y Fan Fach, Carmarthenshire, and she becomes his wife on condition that he never hit her: scarcely unreasonable. Needing a horse in a hurry, he *taps* her three times to urge her to catch it. End of a beautiful friendship: she decamps at once, taking the plough and oxen with her in such dudgeon they carve a furrow through the mountain. Other versions illustrate the extremity of the reaction to a few taps. In these, the fairy maiden's condition is that he never strike her with iron. The couple are trying to bring in a skittish colt, which isn't having any of *that*. In frustration, he throws the bridle at it. The bridle – leather and metal – misses the colt and hits the fairy wife, who vanishes instantly. Harte enjoins us to notice the symbolism of the harness – "a device that tames and restrains that which was previously wild and free" – and goes on to put the story in the context of Welsh peasant *mores* of the time. Here, then, is less a sermon against wife beating – for this was an accident, *ironically* – than a rumination on the nature of marriage, and too on vows between partners. Not to mention last straws. There is a whole drama buried in this brief tale, but we are the ones who are left to write it, in our heads or in conversation. Or perhaps there's a Welsh *Rashomon* waiting to be made.

In his other treatments too, Harte is careful not to pin down aspects of fairy life and behaviour too firmly, though he doesn't shy away from strong hints. Two chapters that deal with fairies who work in the house or on the farm reach no absolute conclusions, but we do note that if the fairies are going to help out with the chores, or reward tasks well done with gold or silver, telling anyone will bring the assistance to an abrupt halt. One of the weirder fairies is the scary hairy naked boggart, always male, who comes down the chimney at night and does the cleaning and washing-up, maybe even some laundry too, to perfection. One wonders if this figure didn't inspire JK Rowling's frightful, fawning little creep of a house-elf, Dobby. But offer a reward – particularly of clothes – and he'll take offence and boggart off. It remains mysterious as to quite *why*, in any well-regulated household, a boggart was required to explain its order and



"A CHILDREN'S STORY THAT CAN ONLY BE ENJOYED BY CHILDREN IS NOT A GOOD CHILDREN'S STORY IN THE SLIGHTEST."

CS Lewis

cleanliness. Did the creature start life as a joke, out of a goodwife or housemaid's modesty? Or was the boggart's bogging-off in umbrage sometimes the pivot in these stories, a handy fall-back for when things went a bit awry? Best ask a boggart. Which is difficult.

The meddling of fairies may be used to explain human waywardness, if only to the neighbours or to salve a conscience or two. The absence, especially if temporary, of an errant wife may be attributed to being 'taken'. A wife who's thrown out of the house for some reason can be said to have been a changeling; one suspects a fading of bridal meek-and-mildness and the emergence of a scold and termagant (scarcely an unusual marital trajectory) in such cases. Babies howling from earache and incorrigibly bolshy children may be likewise rationalised as fairy-afflicted. As Harte says: "Babies become changelings when they are seen as unlovable." It seems to be rare that horrid husbands are 'changed' or whisked away by the fairies. Is that a selection bias, or a reflection

of traditional patriarchal power relations?

Harte has a fascinating chapter on people who've had sex with fairies, but one of his more interesting tales appears in one on fairies and death. One Hallowe'en a young man named Kern frightens away four men carrying an open coffin along the strand at Querin, County Clare, and finds it contains a beautiful and still living young woman. He persuades her to come home with him. She lives with him chastely for a year, and never speaks and never eats. Passing a fairy fort one night he chances to overhear fairies within it, discussing his case. They seem rather smug that his prize gives him no pleasure, although if he'd but spread the cloth – her father's tablecloth – that had covered her in the coffin, she'd eat and drink from it, and speak. He does, and she does. The spell is broken. She explains how she was abducted on her wedding day. Kern, plainly an honourable man, takes her home to her father. The two men get on fine, and in due course Kern marries the girl. Harte comments: "Here... we recognise... concerns about strangers, family and marriage, about eating and belonging. The young lady in the coffin is not dead, but she is not fully alive either. Forces from outside herself have sealed her mouth to cut her off from speaking, eating or belonging [emphasis added] – and symbolically, at least, it is not just her mouth which is a sealed opening... since she cannot become [Kern's] wife, not until the hostile magic is overcome. Eating food from her father's tablecloth is followed by reunion with her family, as if the two actions were two ways of expressing the same thing. As young Kern is accepted by her family, so he ceases to be a threat which freezes her into silence and immobility, and takes the place of the expected husband." As with many of these stories, one is left to ponder what's left out. The girl, never named, is the sole female in the piece: her family doesn't appear to include her Mam. What happened to the stood-up groom? Would she have been as frozen had the marriage gone ahead? We can't help but notice that Kern, with his patient forbearance, is hardly the embodiment of 'toxic masculinity'.

Harte's commentary on the many tales he reproduces is not unlike this – he doesn't tell you everything, leaving it the reader to engage the imagination. He packs more into this short book by way of allusion and implication (and humour: very funny on Freud) than most manage in many a weightier tome. This one's a keeper.

Jeremy Harte, *Explore Fairy Traditions*, Explore Books/Heart of Albion Press, 2004.

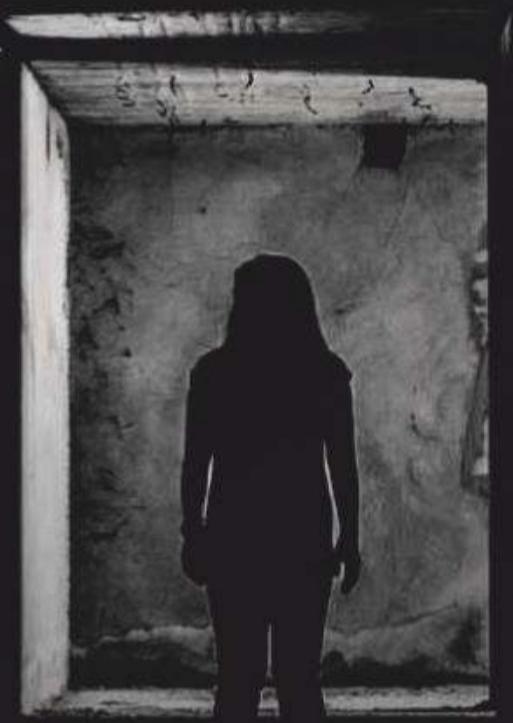
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A long, strange trip of lights fantastic

An important history of ufology from 19th century airship ‘flaps’ onwards gets a thorough updating, and welcomes the Internet as heralding a new and welcome era for its scholarly examination

The UFO Encyclopedia

The Phenomenon from the Beginning, 3rd Edn

Jerome Clark

Omnigraphics 2018

Hb, 1520pp, illus, bib, ind, \$155.00, ISBN 9780780816596

Few books on ufology are more valuable than this massive enterprise from ufology’s foremost historian. This third edition of his *UFO Encyclopedia* (*UFOE3*) updates, with a thorough revision and more than 100 new entries, the second edition’s two volumes (published in 1998), which in turn revised the first edition’s three volumes (1990, 1992 and 1996). Now, you get over 1,500 pages in two solid volumes.

Jerry Clark has been a writer, reporter and editor with serious UFO periodicals since the early 1960s. He was an associate editor, then full editor, of *FATE* magazine until 1989, and a board member of the prestigious Center for UFO Studies. His reference works include the *Encyclopedia of Strange and Unexplained Physical Phenomena* (1993); *Hidden Realms, Lost Civilizations, and Beings from Other Worlds* (2010); and three editions of *Unexplained: Strange Sightings, Incredible Occurrences, and Puzzling Physical Phenomena* (2012). He’s also a songwriter and scholar of America folk music, with a special interest in songs derived from fairy lore.

With nearly five decades of experience of his subject, he commands an expert knowledge, with sensible calm and a keen intellect.

Erudite and polite (especially when disagreeing), he has earned the respect of his peers and colleagues. His judgement

and authentic scholarship are valued. While there are contributions from expert colleagues (Eddie Bullard, Bill Chalker, Brad Sparks, Thiago Tichetti and Thomas Tulien), Clark has written 90 per cent or more of the entries – just one reason why this is such an important publication.

The two volumes present a detailed examination of how the ‘UFO phenomenon’ emerged – more than a century before the advent of the first ‘flying saucers’ in 1943 – with sightings of anomalous aerial objects (including the late 19th century airship ‘flap’), reporting of which was pioneered (to some extent) by Charles Fort.

Through the 20th century, interest in the subject grew among researchers, investigators, groups and publications, and it became better known around the world.

From the 1960s, Clark explains, an ideological and cultural schism widened between those who studied and chronicled the subject seriously and its exploitation both in the media and in the cultish enclaves of conspiracy-believers, abductees, star children and alien-wannabes. That rift persists.

The vital step-change precipitated by the Internet “[collapsed] much of organized ufology into informal, sometimes mutually uncomprehending tribes, usually gathered around a website and/or an email discussion network”. The Internet and digitising of archives has also “opened up historical UFO research as never before”, heralding a new era of scholarship addressing the phenomenon and its denizens.

On important topics, Clark’s

“One of ufology’s weaknesses is the lack of generally agreed language (and terms)”

entries are satisfactorily detailed. On the technical level, the principal cases (sightings, reports, investigations and controversies) are fully described. On the societal level, he layers into the mix any related personalities, hoaxes, theories and even debunking campaigns. He has done us all a favour by summarising the reams of declassified UFO-related documents spewed from the many secret and not-so-secret government programmes.

Space is given to analysing the effects on the field of the first ‘serious’ movie about UFOs and abductions – Spielberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in 1977 – while not ignoring the ‘best’ of other UFO or contact-themed films. Peppered through the overview are his selection of critical cases, from the hardest ‘nuts-and-bolts’ ones, to those that seem to support the ‘extraterrestrial hypothesis’ (like the abductions of the Hills and Travis Walton), to the unclassifiable (like the encounters experienced by Whitley Strieber and Betty Andreasson) which seem to involve psychical phenomena of the kind experienced by mystics and shamans – all dealt with even-handedly.

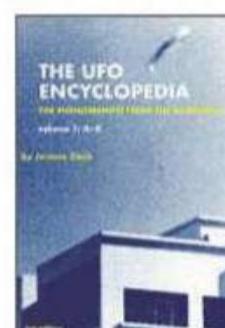
To begin with, the reactions of officials and authorities to the sightings of ‘discs’, reports

of encounters with entities, and the more disturbing reports of telepathic invasion, medical examination, implanted devices, and alien-human hybrids, has been inadequate. Bafflement, thinly veiled hostility, and an institutionalised prejudice towards witnesses (and even investigators) of anomalous experiences are rife in this history, yet Clark acknowledges the engagement of ‘skeptics’ at all levels (some with useful dialogue, others with character assassination or outright rejection).

One of ufology’s many weaknesses, Clark argues, is the lack of a generally agreed language (and terms). “We possess the technical tools to judge the value and meaning of physical evidence, [yet] we cannot always explain how something that seems entirely real on an experience level may

not be real on an event level.” So-called ‘high-strangeness’ cases may be a sign that we simply have no complete idea, yet, of the nature and scope of human experience.

Whether we are talking about claims of interstellar voyages, being chased by Mothman or chasing Bigfoot, a significant minority of today’s ufologists and forteans, Clark argues, have interpreted such anomalous experiences as “modern correlates of traditional supernatural belief”. We must be careful, he says, in cases where experiences have been “shaped by cultural assumption and expectation”. Some interpretations of the prominent ‘psychosocial’ cases included in



Continued on p62

Strangely attractive...

The war of the sexes continues, in evolutionary terms anyway, but reading about it in this marvellously cheap book is a real treat

Sexual Selection

A Very Short Introduction

Marlene Zuk & Leigh Simmons

Oxford University Press 2018

Pb, 141pp, illus, £7.99, ISBN 9780198778752

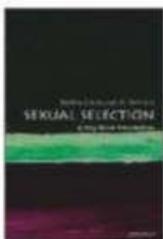
When it comes to sexual selection, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Female baboons entice prospective mates by developing colourful swellings on their rumps when they are sexually receptive. Male Drosophila fruit flies perform elaborate 'dances', sometimes to a 'tune' generated by their rapidly moving wings. Several birds and mammals – including hammer-headed bats and topi antelopes – congregate at communal 'leks'. Males display and the winners mate.

Choosing the 'best' mate to ensure your genes survive lies at the heart of sexual selection.

For instance, a few males (or even a single one) account for most matings after a lek. The display seems to offer the females subtle clues to a potential partner's fitness, such as whether or not they harbour parasites.

Similarly, female sticklebacks prefer males with an intense red coloration on their throat and bellies, which derives from carotenoids (pigments that make, for instance, tomatoes red) in the diet. Male sticklebacks care for and protect the eggs. So, the red is a good sign of a healthy diet, longevity and better parental care. And many parasites that infect sticklebacks reduce the intensity of the red coloration. Males with a strong coloration tend to pass on immunity to at least some parasites.

Sometimes, sexual selection doesn't end after mating finishes. Male damselflies and dragonflies physically



drag sperm from previous copulations from the female's reproductive tract using back-facing spines on a specialised organ before depositing their load. Male Heliconius (passion-vine) butterflies deliver chemicals that make females unattractive.

This delightful book is packed with other examples of the behaviours and signals that drive sexual selection throughout the animal kingdom, which make a fascinating compendium in their own right. But Zuk and Simmons use the examples to illustrate and bring to life fundamental biological principles.

Male bed bugs, for example, use needle-like genitalia to stab the female in the abdomen, then ejaculate into her body cavity. Not surprisingly, this increases the risk of infection and shortens her lifespan. So, the females of some species of bugs evolved structures in the areas stabbed by the male that accept his genitalia and reduce the damage. The war of the sexes continues, in evolutionary terms at least.

Zuk and Simmons neatly avoid the anthropomorphising trap, while highlighting the relevance to humans when appropriate. Many animals – as the examples above show – chose their mates based on what they perceive as biological fitness, which humans conceptualise as 'attractiveness'. An accurate biological description of human beauty and attractiveness is notoriously elusive. Nevertheless, attractive men and women tend to have more children than their homelier peers.

Human behaviour recapitulates the wider animal kingdom in other ways. During menstruation, for example,

women of the Dogon people of Mali live in special huts. This allows men to monitor their partner's cycle and reduces the risk of cuckoldry, which, Zuk and Simmons suggest, is an example of 'mate guarding', another behaviour that is widespread throughout the animal kingdom.

Tit-bits that should appeal to forteans are sprinkled liberally throughout this informative and insightful book. Did you know, for example, that the Argentinian duck has a penis about the same length as its body – almost half a metre – which is corkscrew shaped?

Or the baculum (penis bone) is the most diversely shaped bone in mammals? Despite the colloquial expression, men don't have a baculum. But ground squirrels have a spoon-shaped one with tooth-like projections. Those of rice rats and voles are trident-shaped. A wonderful photograph shows the diversity.

Or that Ismail the Bloodthirsty (1672–1727), the Emperor of Morocco, supposedly fathered 888 kids? Zuk and Simmons report – based on a computer simulation originally published in PLOS One (<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0085292>) – that he'd need to have had sex with one of his four wives or 500 concubines about once a day for 32 years delivering 2.3 trillion sperm. I'm surprised he had the strength to be bloodthirsty.

Sexual Selection is thin and relatively cheap, but it's packed with more information than other books four times the size and price.

I loved it and I'd thoroughly recommend it to professional biologists and 'general' readers alike. It's likely to be the most interesting £8 you'll spend in a while.

Mark Greener



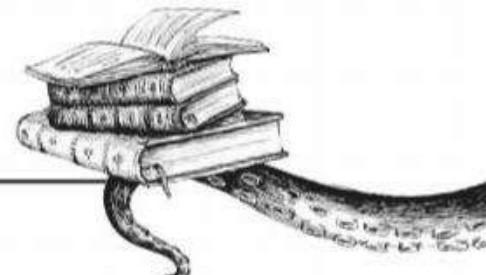
Continued from p61

UFOE3, for example, illustrate the danger of taking narratives at face value. Where once ufologists aspired to match the language of pragmatic science, Clark observes, "they now retreat into demonology". When faced with the choice between occultism and reductionism, Clark has opted for fortean "intellectual agnosticism". Sometimes, the only honest response is that we simply don't know the answer.

Clark's unparalleled experience of the field allows him to flesh out his entries with salient facts about the origins, histories and accomplishments of the many and diverse people, groups and institutions, their arguments and their investigations. Many parochial histories have appeared, but *UFOE3* transcends them all in scale, detail and impartiality. Had Clark not spent his time and energy on this, its grand portrait of one of modern society's pervasive preoccupations would be lost to future scholars – or at least would be difficult to piece together. I was hoping to use the word 'magisterial' to describe *UFOE3*, but another reviewer got there first. Nevertheless, it is appropriate. *UFOE3* is magisterial in its scope, content, execution and trustworthiness. It has no rivals and is unlikely to be improved upon in a long time.

The supporting apparatus is necessarily extensive with listings of UFO-related websites and organisations; a comprehensive bibliography of every (4,000+) source consulted; and a good index of people, organisations, publications and subjects. It is a pity that the hefty size and price limit the sales of this work to well-funded individuals or library and academic institutions. *UFOE3* is a resource that deserves to be consulted in the first instance by anyone with a query about, or interest in, UFOs and related subjects. The solution is to get out there, go down to your nearest 'resource centre', and insist (nicely) that it is absolutely vital – especially in this age of fake news and conspiracy-mongering – that they have a copy and make it available to all. Bob Rickard





Dinomania

Why We Love, Fear and Are Utterly Enchanted by Dinosaurs

Boria Sax

Reaktion Books 2018

Hb, 264pp, illus, bib, index, £20, ISBN 9781789140040

Dinosaurs have fascinated us since the middle of the 19th century, and their appeal shows no sign of diminishing. In *Dinomania*, Boria Sax explores the cultural history of the dinosaur, chronicling their changing meanings and searching for the reasons that dinosaurs have such a hold on our imagination.

Sax ties the cultural role of dinosaurs both to changing understanding of humanity's role in the world and to fundamental fears and concerns that date back to the beginnings of human civilisation. *Dinomania* explores topics such as the relationship between dinosaurs and industrialisation, their importance to a changing popular understanding of deep time, and dinosaurs as a symbol of loss and extinction. Other sections cover the human fear of predation, public art and exhibitions, and the relationship between dinosaurs and dragons.

Sax identifies trends in human understanding and representation of dinosaurs, driven partly by new discoveries in palaeontology and partly by new public demands. For instance, he describes and analyses the classic pairing of tyrannosaurus and triceratops – a conflict that probably seldom happened in reality – and the process by which it replaced the standard 19th-century contrast between megalosaurus and iguanodon. The change, Sax argues, has less to do with palaeontology than with how well these dinosaurs fit into a cultural sense of size and ferocity. These topics all point toward Sax's central theme: that dinosaurs as we understand them are as much a human creation as a real animal, as much a product of our own fears and desires as our understanding of prehistory.

Dinomania is visually impressive; 128 illustrations form a striking record of changing portrayals of dinosaurs.

Dinomania is a broad

discussion rather than a deep one; it covers a wide range of topics, connecting them to each other but not exploring any one of them in great depth. It's not superficial, though; it's somewhere between an erudite after-dinner conversation and a more grounded academic discussion. This discursive approach works for a topic that invites speculation.

Dinomania is a fascinating look at a curious subject. It ties many aspects of society together by looking at them from a new angle. Unlike most cultural histories, however, it's got dinosaurs in it.

James Holloway

★★★★★

Foul Deeds & Suspicious Deaths In and Around Frome

Mick Davis & David Lassman

Pen & Sword True Crime 2018

Pb, 160pp, illus, bib, £12.99, ISBN 9781526706041



Behind a ponderous title is an enjoyable volume of lively local history. Frome, a market town in Somerset founded in AD 685, has gone through periods of prosperity and notoriety, prominence and poverty, often as a centre of industry, sometimes as a backwater.

Although the authors concentrate mostly on 'orrible crimes, two chapters will interest forteans. The first concerns the contribution to the philosophy behind witch-hunting of Joseph Glanvill (1636–80), vicar of Frome. A Fellow of the Royal Society, and supporter of religious toleration and of science, he also investigated the paranormal, and his writing on the dangers of scepticism about the existence of witches provided, posthumously, much of the intellectual justification for the horrors of Salem. This section mentions a Frome woman suspected of witchcraft who was subjected to the Ordeal by Water (if you drown, you're innocent; if you survive, you're guilty). She survived – and prosecuted her dunkers for attempted murder.

Another chapter deals with the riotous battles in the town in the 19th century between the

evangelical Salvation Army and its beer-loving opponents, the Skeleton Army. The Skeletons are known to amateurs of weird social history, but I was unaware to what extent they had the sympathy of the Establishment; the Salvationists were considered scofflaws who provoked trouble by staging illegal street rallies. The account of what happened when the police had finally had enough of the tambourine-wielding yobbos is eye-opening.

Mat Coward

★★★★★

Inadvertent Images

A History of Photographic Apparitions

Peter Geimer; trans: Gerrit Jackson

University of Chicago Press 2018

Hb, 229pp, illus, notes, ind, £41.50, ISBN 9780226471877



Rather than looking at how photography brought the 'real' world into an accessible format, fixed in time and space, *Photographic Apparitions* focuses upon the philosophical issues that arose through its process. It draws upon discourses across the humanities and scientific worlds; the general reader may find its philosophical underpinning off-putting.

The opening chapters take the reader through the origins of photography and its prehistory in images rendered through the action of lightning and studied in earnest by Pierre Lamy in the 17th century. Geimer makes clear that his task is to consider the origins of the photographic process across a variety of events, natural and of human design. He documents how Thomas Wedgwood and Humphrey Davy exploited pioneers such as Louis Daguerre and Johann Heinrich Schulze to imprint images in the early 19th century. Of equal importance to him are the shortcomings of the process through which blotches and other anomalies appear – the photographic 'other'. Geimer suggests they highlight issues at the heart of our understanding of what we 'see': do they represent the world or the process? Drawing upon theorists such as Roland Barthes, Bruno Latour and Paul Virilio, Geimer discusses how the 'enemies of

the photographer' became integral to the development of photographic mechanisms that could interrogate the invisible. This interest in images of X-rays, electricity and radiation, he argues, led to an aestheticism that relied upon technical procedure, giving birth to abstraction and the exploratory use of the photographic medium. He examines artists such as August Strindberg, Nobuyoshi Araki and Sigmar Polke, who used the process to unearth magical, photochemical worlds, in which the 'accident' defamiliarises the 'real'. In his case studies of the Shroud of Turin and Effluviology, Geimer suggests that photography could assert and question beliefs that lay outside the scope of the process – the photograph as cultural agent. He discusses how scrutiny of the Shroud of Turin since its emergence in 1349 and its subsequent history as an object of forensic documentation has become a theological bone of contention within the Catholic Church. Likewise, with the 19th century interest in human life forces, the emergence of clinical photography of the brain, animal magnetism and their interest to contemporaneous occult movements, Geimer looks at the work of such maverick scientists as Jules-Bernard Luys and Louis Barget and their attempts to document the 'Od and Psychod'.

Although Geimer provides a fantastic survey and analysis of the cultural processes that led to the inception and exploitation of photography as a commercial and philosophical tool, the language is academic. I found much of the material fascinating, especially his concluding remarks on how the limitations of the human eye have led to the creation of perceptual prosthetics that allow us a foray into invisible worlds – truly exciting stuff! With comprehensive notes and index, along with many illustrations, this is a must for the student of philosophy, history of science, art or cultural history, or those with a technical interest in forensic photography. A detailed survey of a curious aspect of a very familiar technology.

Chris Hill

★★★★★

As good as it gets

'One man's meat is another's poison' applies even among the visionaries studied here

The Last Utopians

Four Late Nineteenth-Century Visionaries and Their Legacy

Michael Robertson

Princeton University Press 2018
Hb, 336pp, illus, notes, ind, £24, ISBN 9780691154169

Michael Chabon, director of the upcoming Captain Picard series, was recently quoted as saying: "We have this responsibility to continue to articulate a hopeful, positive vision of the future." Fiction, over the past decade or so especially, has tended toward the dystopian. If the trend is toward a more optimistic vision, then Robertson's *The Last Utopians* has arrived at the right time.

Starting with Thomas More's *Utopia*, the first chapter is an overview of ideas from thinkers such as Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier. This is important to place the main part of *The Last Utopians* in a cultural and historical context.

The heart of the book consists of four chapters, each looking at a different Utopian: Edward Bellamy, William Morris, Edward Carpenter, and Charlotte Perkins-Gilman.

While all four wrote books that laid out Utopian ideas, each had their own way of arriving at the perfect society. Utopias are often stereotyped as vague, sterile and similar, and this is often used to sell the popularity of dystopias in fiction. Robertson shows the variety in Utopian thought, from Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, with its dignity of labour, to Edward Carpenter's belief that the vanguard of the move toward Utopianism would come from the gay community who, he argued, were less sensual and more spiritual than other men and women.



He captures the gulfs between the writers; how Elizabeth Perkins-Gilman's teenage experiences in the Swedenborgian communal house turned her away from communal living, which is very much in contrast to Bellamy's Utopian vision, and how anarcho-socialist William Morris's beliefs were. (Until I read the chapter here I did not realise the anarcho-communist Kropotkin admired Morris's ideas.)

Robertson does not shy away from the difficult aspects of 19th century Utopian belief, such as Perkins-Gilman's interest in eugenics. He also makes a good argument for Hitler and Stalin's strategies of creating the world anew embodying ruthless utopianism, putting Orwell's *1984*, for example, in this context as an anti-Utopian, rather than dystopian, book.

The book finishes with Robertson's own accounts of visiting contemporary communities such as Findhorn and the Radical Færies, as well as discussions about Utopianism in education (such as Waldorf-Steiner), and the food activism movements.

I would have been interested to see Robertson put the Solarpunk genre in the historical context of Utopianism, but to be fair this is a fairly new strand of fiction, and this is a minor quibble.

The Last Utopians is a very readable account of Utopian thought at the end of the 19th century, as well as presenting a good argument for how such approaches can influence society, even when they don't achieve all their goals. Highly recommended for writers and those interested in the history of political thought.

Steve Toase



The New Genesis

The Greatest Experiment on Earth

Wojciech K Kulczyk Phd

The New Genesis Foundation 2017
Pb, 228pp, notes, gloss, £9.99, ISBN 978199906009

As an agnostic physicist, Wojciech Kulczyk cannot accept religious or supernatural explanations for our creation, nor can he totally agree with the idea that evolution blindly created us from a primæval soup.

To get to grips with his concept of a 'new genesis', Wojciech takes a 'purely' scientific approach to the subject. Step-by-step he takes a detailed look at how Earth was specially selected due to its unique position in the Milky Way and its special conditions that are able to support life. From there, chapters are devoted to how water came to this planet, how the first complex organisms thrived in this environment and how the biological systems developed and changed over millions of years.

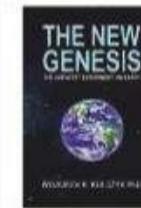
This culminates in the development of mankind and the human brain that is covered in chapters 8 and 9.

Kulczyk examines the limitations of mutations and natural selection that are the basic tenets of Darwin's theory of evolution, and goes on to outline the new paradigm of intelligent design that tries to accommodate these problems.

By chapter 13 he is able to take an overall view of the major events on Earth to show that they were not chance occurrences but part of a special experiment by extraterrestrial beings.

As further evidence of alien intervention, he cites examples of UFO reports, like the mass sighting of a dancing light at Fatima in October 1917. He does accept that the majority of sightings can be explained but thinks "...there is a strong unconscious resistance to accepting evidence for the existence of intelligent beings on Earth."

This is certainly a far more considered and scientific study of our genesis and the possibility that extraterrestrials have spent millions if not billions of years to



create us as a highly developed life form, than any 'Ancient Alien' stuff churned out by cynical TV producers. Kulczyk

makes a good case for showing flaws in evolution and religious thinking, but filling the vacuum with this ET intervention theory is a step too far. Nuts and bolts ufologists and ancient astronaut theorists will love it.

Nigel Watson



Beyond the Sixth Extinction

A Post-Apocalyptic Pop-Up

Text & paper engineering: Shawn Sheehy; illus: Jordi Solano

Candlewick Studio 2018
Hb, 40pp, illus, \$65.00, ISBN 9780763687885

This field guide to the critters of the Cagoan District is based in and around the ruins of Cago, near Lake Mishkin, which flourished from the 19th to 27th centuries. At the time of writing, the year 4847, the district is found to be home to rapidly evolving species and a thriving ecosystem, detailed here in attractive drawings and very fine paper engineering.

The creatures' evolution has been rapid because of tropical temperatures, high levels of background radiation causing 'useful' mutations and adaptations allowing these new species to convert industrial waste into food. The rex roach, for instance, lives in former nuclear facilities and neutralises radioactivity. The peteybug metabolises plastics and chows down on old CDs. The clam fungus mines carbon and hydrogen from methane in its landfill habitat. Some of the adaptive behaviours described are lighthearted (the mudmop's "locating and acquiring food with tentacles"), but it's a fairly sobering read overall. The future does not look pretty.

And any similarity to Chicago and Lake Michigan is purely coincidental...

William Darragh





ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

The Supernatural in Society, Culture and History

Eds: Dennis Waskul & Marc Eaton

Temple University Press 2018

Pb, 256pp, illus, refs, ind, \$34.95, ISBN 9781439915257

This anthology, edited by two professors of sociology – Waskul at Minnesota State University and Eaton at Ripon College, Wisconsin – plays an important role in “the long-needed foundation for the academic study of belief in the supernatural” (as Bill Ellis, one of *FT*’s favourite folklorists, put it). Such discussion as exists – by scientific sceptics and other nay-sayers – tends to focus on the credibility and consistency of the narratives and their encounters, instead of, as this volume argues, discussing why there has been a persistent need for notions of the ‘supernatural’ the world over and a constant re-invention of them over time. It’s a vast prospectus but while it limits itself to a good range of topics – including ghosts and hauntings, ‘dark’ tourism and ‘legend tripping’, fortune telling in various forms, voodoo and Black culture, vampire lore, cryptozoology, and alien abductions – there is an awareness of the larger scale and phenomenology. Two other essays probe the world of ‘paranormal investigations’ and the role of the ‘supernatural’ in various cultures and times. There is also, throughout, a healthy caution about ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches, a major pitfall for both researchers into and critics of ‘supernatural’ beliefs and subjects. For instance cryptozoology holds out the prospect of knowledge of a biological creature, whereas investigating telepathy or poltergeists (even aliens) tell us more about mental and social dynamics. There are always overlaps, of course, and this bleed into adjacent areas is a serious obstacle for conventional, materialist science-based investigations. This is a study that all forteans and anomaly researchers should read, as it presents a serious recognition of the work – and subject matter – of our best writers and researchers.

Magonia**UFOs, Aliens and the Fairy Kingdom**

Nigel Graddon

Adventures Unlimited Press 2018

PB, \$19.95, 260pp, illus, bib. ISBN 9781939149978

This book mashes together the output of most of the modern masters of New Age mythology, folklore, fairytale, magic and ufology so that, on the face of it, there is nothing much we don’t already know. But gradually, if you persist in reading, there is indeed the pleasure of encountering unfamiliar material. Significantly, Graddon’s writing performs a peculiar surrealistic magic (reminiscent of John Keel at his best), revealing and evoking curiously fresh insights. What were tired old topics are shown, through seemingly random conjunctions, to still contain something new and meaningful. Well worth a read, especially for jaded forteans.

The Cygnus Key**The Denisovan Legacy, Göbekli Tepe, and the Birth of Egypt**

Andrew Collins

Bear & Co 2018

PB, 436pp, illus, colour plates, notes, bib, ind, \$24.00, ISBN 9781591432999

It has given us pleasure over the years to see Andrew Collins mature from his days in ‘psychic questing’ to being a knowledgeable commentator on contemporary archaeological and anthropological enigmas, as evidenced by his part in the discovery of a cave system beneath the Giza plateau which has been named after him. In this book he turns to another of his favourite topics, the mysterious city state of Göbekli Tepe that flourished around the end of the last Ice Age, in south-eastern Turkey. In this detailed and clearly explained study, Collins follows two main strands: the significance of the cruciform constellation Cygnus (the Swan) and its influence upon the city alignments of both Göbekli Tepe and the Giza pyramids; and secondly, the trail of clues that suggest a shamanic culture, with its totemic Swan,

was brought to Göbekli Tepe by the race of extinct humans – known as Denisovans – from their ancient homeland in the Altai-Baikal region of Siberia (whence they also spread in the opposite direction to China and Thailand). Collins also proposes that the physical stature of the Denisovans gave rise to legends of gods and giants, and that they had a stone-working culture in advance of other peoples at that time. The bulk of the analysis is of the surviving evidence of the ancient technology and cosmology of these regions, but all of it – if it can be further authenticated – presents a fascinating challenge to the received view of ancient peoples and history.

The Landing Lights of Occult Investigations

David Stokes

Privately published / Amazon 2018

Pb, 236pp, £5.50, ISBN 9781521539248

David Stokes is quite a different kind of writer to Nigel Graddon (above), but like him, provides a well-written, fresh interpretation of a subject often considered to have been ‘mined-out’ long ago. Stokes was a ‘healer’, but much of the focus of the book is how the process of psychical or spiritual healing gives him a place to stand while looking at the occult and psychical undercurrents in Western culture. His “factual account of my inquiries” is very critical of “New Age quackery” and more perceptive about how the ‘spiritual’ undercurrents of modern life works, just what it is that needs to be ‘healed’, and the nature of that ‘healing’ process. His view is more modern Gnostic and radical-esotericist than wishy-washy Spiritualist, and all the more interesting for it.

The Fraternitas Saturni
History, Doctrine, and Rituals of the Magical Order of the Brotherhood of Saturn

Stephen E Flowers

Inner Traditions 2018

Pb, 207pp, notes, bib, ind, \$18.99, ISBN 9781620557211

Nothing heralds the anxiety-inducing chorus of Carmina

Burana like a sinister book title in Latin. This is the fourth and expanded revision of Flowers’s 1990 study of arguably the most influential magical society in Germany during the 20th century – the Brotherhood of Saturn (*Fraternitas Saturni*) – which featured a distinctive blend of Gnosticism, Freemasonry and Western Luciferian occultism. From its beginnings in Weimar Berlin in 1926 until the 1970s, it was, says Dr Flowers, “almost totally secret”, gaining notoriety later for its “sensational sex-magic practices”. Using rare records in German archives, he presents as complete a portrait of the FS as you might hope for, including its rituals, grades, temples, memberships and the philosophy behind its ‘Yoga of the Dark Light’. Here, too, its influence upon other groups (including Crowley’s enterprises) is explored. No need for the anxiety, though, as Flowers writes lightly, skilfully and with impressive erudition.

Human Errors**A Panorama of Our Glitches, from Pointless Bones to Broken Genes**

Nathan H Lents

Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2018

Hb, 256pp, illus, notes, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781474608336

It’s been a while since we had a good book on medical forteana and this entertaining survey is full of them – pointless bones, broken genes, ‘junk’ DNA, faulty knees, redundant organs, the stump of a tail, too many bones in the wrist, retinas that face backward, inability to make some vitamins (where some animals can), muscles that attach to nothing, pointless toes and dangerous lymph glands, to name just a few of them. Lents – a professor of biology at the City University of New York – tries to find the reason why the human body is so poorly designed and much fun is generated by his easy style as he ticks off the list of our body parts. Most disturbing, though, are the decline in human fertility and the fact that our brains cannot get much larger or they will not pass through the pelvic birth canal. Nevertheless, it would make a great gift for a curious friend or youngster.

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD, UK.

Peter's friends

By diving deep into the multiverse and making the language of comic books part of its story-telling language, Sony's animated Spider-Man film provides an irresistably fresh take on superheroics



Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse

Dir Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey, Rodney Rothman, US 2018
On UK release

Amidst the never-ending flood of superhero movies, Spider-Man is undoubtedly the character that has been most often reworked and revamped. By now, the origin story of Peter Parker has been done to death, and you would be hard-pressed to find any casual superhero movie fan who feels neglected in terms of Parker-centric offerings.

However, filmmakers have finally realised that there are many more characters from the Spider-Verse available to pick from – and so here is *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, Miles Morales's first outing on the big screen. He is accompanied by several other characters from across the multiverse, so the film will also be many people's first experience of the likes of Spider-Gwen, Peter Porker, Spider-Man Noir and Peni Parker, and as ludicrous as that might look on paper, it works incredibly well.

With such an elaborate cluster of diverse Spider-characters on display, one could be forgiven for worrying that the film would be

It delivers the feeling of actually being inside a comic book

a jumbled mess; however, this is thankfully not the case. While the main emphasis is on just a few of the big screen newcomers, everyone gets a moment or two that gives them a purpose in the narrative. We get a good, basic sense of the supporting players' worlds without being weighed down by exposition, making the film well-paced and always focused on its main narrative. As a result, the nearly two hours of runtime briskly swing by without any disengaging or dull moments.

In terms of tone, the film is supremely balanced, managing to keep both its comical and dramatic momentum throughout. The humour seems more at home in this animated world than in many live-action superhero films, and the dramatic aspects of Miles Morales's interpersonal relationships are portrayed with sincere emotion that keeps the viewer engaged beyond the film's dazzling visual appeal.

As for the animation itself, it is fresh, creative and wonderfully textured, delivering the feeling of actually being inside a comic book. While other films have occasionally employed devices such as comic book panels and text on screen, *Into the Spider-Verse* does this in the most consistent and best executed manner yet, making it as much a remarkable technical achievement as an all-round good film.

In addition, it also manages to create a New York that feels contemporary, authentic and vibrant, thereby building a practical framework that helps ground the fantastical narrative and sequences unfolding within it.

Production company executives have long since realised how big a market there is for superhero films; characters no one would have imagined ever getting their own movies are being green-lit, and the impressive debuts of many a superhero show how the transition from comic book to cinematic feature often feels natural. However, we also have to sit through a lot of shlock, not least because most executives seem to assume that if, say, one Batman movie works, then all Batman movies will also work by default. With *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* we are spared another bland reboot and instead get something genuinely exciting and new – and I, for one, cannot wait to return to Earth-1610.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Mortal Engines

Dir Christian Rivers, NZ/US 2018
On UK release

Directed by newcomer Christian Rivers and produced and written by Peter Jackson & Co., *Mortal Engines* seeks to adapt Philip Reeve's book of the same name and turn it into a cinematic epic destined to have multiple sequels.

However, while it is indeed somewhat cinematic at times, *Mortal Engines* is neither epic nor deserving of any sequels.

It's a fantasy in which vast mobile cities (like London) roam a post-apocalyptic world, preying on smaller settlements, until some plucky young outcasts (Hera Hilmar and Robert Sheehan) decide to do something about it. Some have called the film a steampunk version of *Star Wars*, but given that it lacks any texture or intricacy, this can only be described as the kind of steampunk found on clearance at Hot Topic, and even your most sullen, alternative teenager would be hard pressed not to scoff at it, because it is as caricatural as it is utterly underwhelming and lazily executed.

While there is some appeal in the visual effects used to create the post-apocalyptic landscape, it is simply not as impressive as one has come to expect from the talent associated with both Weta Workshop and Weta Digital, and there is certainly not enough spectacle present to elevate the film to be anything other than a derivative, dull and soulless husk of a film.

As for the people that inhabit the universe of *Mortal Engines*, the adaptations of the characters are what truly drag the film under. Not only is the writing formulaic and one-dimensional, it is also heavily laden with clichés and tropes. As a result, you see any twists coming from a mile away before they are revealed, and once they are revealed, you do not care about them, because the writing renders the film all but impossible to engage with.

The direction exacerbates this further; while the cast have arguably been given very little to work with in terms of character motivations and development, the flatness of the performances across the board is still inexcusable. While you can take



your pick from characters you don't care about, the most glaring issue is undoubtedly the sheer lack of chemistry between the two leads. Seemingly serving no purpose other than ensuring that the film becomes an excruciatingly bland viewing experience, at no point do these characters ever become compelling, and their inevitable romance is laughably underbaked.

Even when one takes into consideration that the film's teenage target audience may be a more forgiving one – and that franchises aimed at this audience segment are often mocked in spite of that audience finding enjoyment in such films – one would be hard-pressed to find a valid argument for how *Mortal Engines* could possibly compete with the likes of the *Twilight* and *Maze Runner* film series, lambasted as those may be by adult cinemagoers. Instead, *Mortal Engines* lands with a crashing thud in the cemetery of failed attempts at launching film franchises based on imaginative books, as it seems highly unlikely that the additional films planned will go forward after the box office failure that surely looms on the horizon.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Requiem

Dir Mahalia Belo, UK 2018

Acorn Media, £24.99 (DVD)

Minutes before cellist Matilda Grey (Lydia Wilson) is to perform at the Royal Festival Hall, her mother cuts her own throat in front of her. Going through her things, Matilda finds a box of photos and cuttings about a little girl, Carys Howell, who disappeared from a Welsh village some 20 years earlier. She and her loyal (and incredibly patient) friend and accompanist Hal (Joel Fry) head off to Wales – arriving just as an elderly man is being buried after his apparent suicide. He has left his home to an Australian great-nephew who had never met him – who invites Matilda and Hal to stay.

Matilda has had disturbing dreams about an underground passage, where she sees a little girl, and she soon discovers a cellar full of tapes of creepy music and a locked bedroom with the window blacked out. All the mirrors in the house have been smashed, but

every time she catches sight of herself in a shard of glass she has a flashback to her dream. She thinks she sees people – or *something* – in the woods; she discovers a drawing and a carving of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*. With every new strangeness the series relies on eerie music and distorted whispering voices to build up unease – possibly an indication of the weakness of the story and the less than dynamic direction.

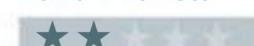
Clichés abound. There's a surly pub landlord and his sexy barmaid daughter; an efficient young police woman; a kindly retired police inspector. Of course, no one is quite who they appear to be. It slowly becomes apparent that there is a conspiracy in the village, involving many of the characters – but what?

Matilda becomes convinced that she is Carys, and makes herself deeply unpopular with Carys's mother and step-father and the local police officer by announcing this to all and sundry. A simple DNA test would have settled the issue one way or the other, but that would have cut short the is-she/ isn't-she plot.

All the main cast perform convincingly; Lydia Wilson is particularly good as the increasingly troubled Matilda. But there simply isn't enough story to sustain six one-hour episodes. It meanders through the first five episodes with little plot development beyond the possibility that Matilda might not be imagining it all and a suspicion that something very strange is going on. There are hints that the common dramatic format of an apparently supernatural story having a purely psychological explanation may not be the case here. The explosive final episode is not only unexpected after five long drawn out episodes (and has more action than all five together), but jarringly unlikely.

The most unbelievable scene in the entire story isn't something weirdly occult; it's when Matilda smashes her cello at the end of the third episode. A punk rock drummer or guitarist might do that as a nihilist statement on stage, but not a professional cellist who has a deep relationship with her instrument – which, in any case, is worth a small fortune.

David V Barrett



SHORTS

THE OLD DARK HOUSE

Eureka Entertainment, £14.99 (Dual Format)

Two sets of travellers take shelter from a Welsh monsoon in the remote titular home of the bizarre Femm family in James Whale's 1932 classic chiller. Replete with gothic tropes, delicious set design and Whale's trademark gallows humour and nudge-nudge campery, it's a box of delights which looks stunning in high definition. While on the surface this is a simple enough tale of things going bump in the night and dark secrets locked in cobwebbed attics, there is a lot more going on beneath the arched brows and rich dialogue. Questions that might be asked of the Femm family would not have received answers even in pre-Code days, and even a dose of social commentary is brought out through a class-crossing relationship. Ernest Thesiger as Horace Femm is the standout, essaying the malicious camp which he would perfect in *Bride of Frankenstein* three years later. It's easy to call *The Old Dark House* out for what it is not – it isn't half as scary as *Frankenstein*, nor as beguilingly off-kilter as *Bride* – but it is nevertheless a little gem which still shines 86 years later.

Martin Parsons ★★★★☆

FANGED UP

Altitude, £5.99 (DVD)

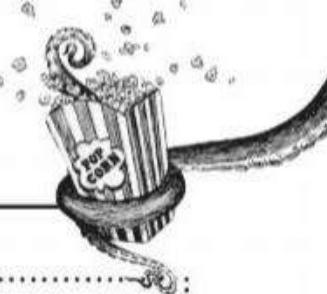
For better or worse, this is "the film with Dapper Laughs in it". I was quite a fan of comedian Daniel O'Reilly's ludicrously un-PC Vine-video lothario, and he acquires himself perfectly well here as luckless loser Jimmy Ragsdale, who ends up banged up in a prison run by vampires (geddit?). It is highly doubtful, however, that this film will be his springboard to an acting career. It starts off being vaguely promising, but the filmed-on-a-mobile look, horrible cheap effects and generally clunky mise-en-scène make it a difficult watch. What enjoyment is to be gleaned comes from the actors; O'Reilly knows his schtick and sticks to it, which will work for some and aggravate others. I liked it. He is ably supported by Vas Blackwood and particularly wrestler Stu Bennett as Jimmy's Russian gentle giant cellmate. Steven Berkoff doesn't need vampire teeth to chew the scenery, but his small role adds a touch of class. There are the makings of a decent late-night flick here – it's just a shame that the lighting is so bad that you have to squint to make them out.

MP ★★☆☆☆

MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN

Fabulous Films, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

It's thematically fitting, perhaps, that John Carpenter's invisible man movie is one of the least noticed of his career. Seriously. I've met movie fans, who have no idea that the horror maestro directed this sci-fi-comedy chase movie in 1992. Chevy Chase, at the time a bankable star, plays a lazy businessman who's so hungover that he stumbles into a nuclear mishap at a science conference. When he wakes up, half the building is missing. When he finds a mirror, he's missing too. The FX were cutting edge for the time and the film has fun with the logistics of invisibility. Does food still show after being swallowed? How do you sleep when you can see through your eyelids? Is it harder to eat Chinese food when you can't see your hands? Yet the film's little more than a pleasant watch for a Sunday afternoon. New York businessman HF Saint penned the novel on which this was based. Hopeful for a new career, he planned on becoming a full-time writer, but when the book earned £2.5 million in adaptation rights he opted for retirement instead. He never wrote another book, and is rumoured to have retired to Europe with his family; in literary terms, HF Saint became as invisible as his likeable-if-workshy protagonist. Rev Peter Laws ★★★☆☆



SOUNDS PECULIAR

BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called ‘the airwaves’.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore ‘pirate’ pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality ‘spoken word’ content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of ‘legitimate’ broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...

the ideas of ‘out there’ author Philip K Dick, including his concept of the multiverse as expressed in his essay “If You Find This World Bad, You Should See Some of the Others” (Episode 10 Philip K Dick: Adrift in the Multiverse), and a two-part, two-hours-and-20-minutes discussion of Dick’s idea that “the symbols of the divine initially show up at the trash stratum” (Episodes 20 and 21: The Trash Stratum). These ideas are all taken seriously, not without humour, but in a straightforward and in-depth manner.

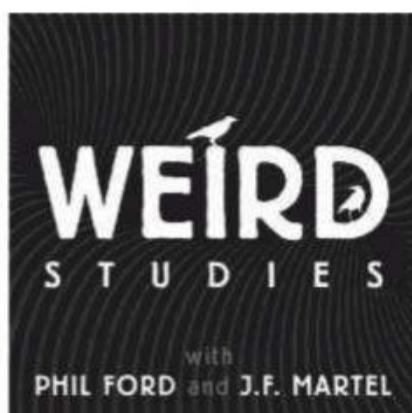
The hosts define their subject thus: “The Weird is easiest to define as whatever lies on the further side of a line between what we can easily accept from our world and what we cannot. And it defines an attitude towards whatever lies on that side of the line: a willingness to remain suspended between explanations and abide in strangeness.” If this kind of stuff floats your intellectual boat, then Weird Studies is probably the podcast for you.

Strengths: *Weird Studies*’s very seriousness is its biggest selling point, but...

Weaknesses: ...some of the discussions can get a bit abstruse and may lose some listeners, especially through their use of academic language.

Recommended Episodes: Ep 1 *Introduction to Weird Studies* (an essential starting point); Ep 4 *Exploring the Weird* (an extrapolation of the basic subject); Ep 9 *On Aleister Crowley and the Idea of Magick* (a debate on Crowley’s 1924 work *Magick in Theory and Practice*); Ep 13 *The Obscure: On the Philosophy of Heraclitus*

Verdict: Sometimes heavy going, *Weird Studies* is however a breath of fresh air in fortean podcasts for its uniquely serious take on the subject.



Podcast: *Weird Studies*
www.weirdstudies.com
Hosts: Phil Ford, JF Martel
Episode Count: 30+
Format: Discussion of fortean ideas between hosts and occasional guests
Established: January 2018
Frequency: Weekly (bi-weekly in summer)
Topics: The weird and the limits of the thinkable

Billed as “A filmmaker and a professor talk art and philosophy at the limits of the thinkable”, *Weird Studies* is – unlike many of the podcasts covered by Sounds Peculiar so far – relentlessly serious. Not for these guys the question of what UFOs might be or whether Bigfoot is really out there. Instead, Professor Phil Ford and writer/filmmaker JF Martel conduct a series of conversations – occasionally with the added participation of a guest – that engage with deep questions

of consciousness, questions of perception, and what they generally call “weird shit”.

Ford is an associate professor of musicology at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, has written a “cultural history of hipness”, and is a huge fan of *Twin Peaks* and Philip K Dick, both of which feature in episodes of the *Weird Studies* podcast. Martel makes French and English language documentaries in Canada focusing on culture and the arts. Together they have self-invented the semi-academic field of *Weird Studies*, which they described as “a scholarly field that doesn’t and can’t exist”.

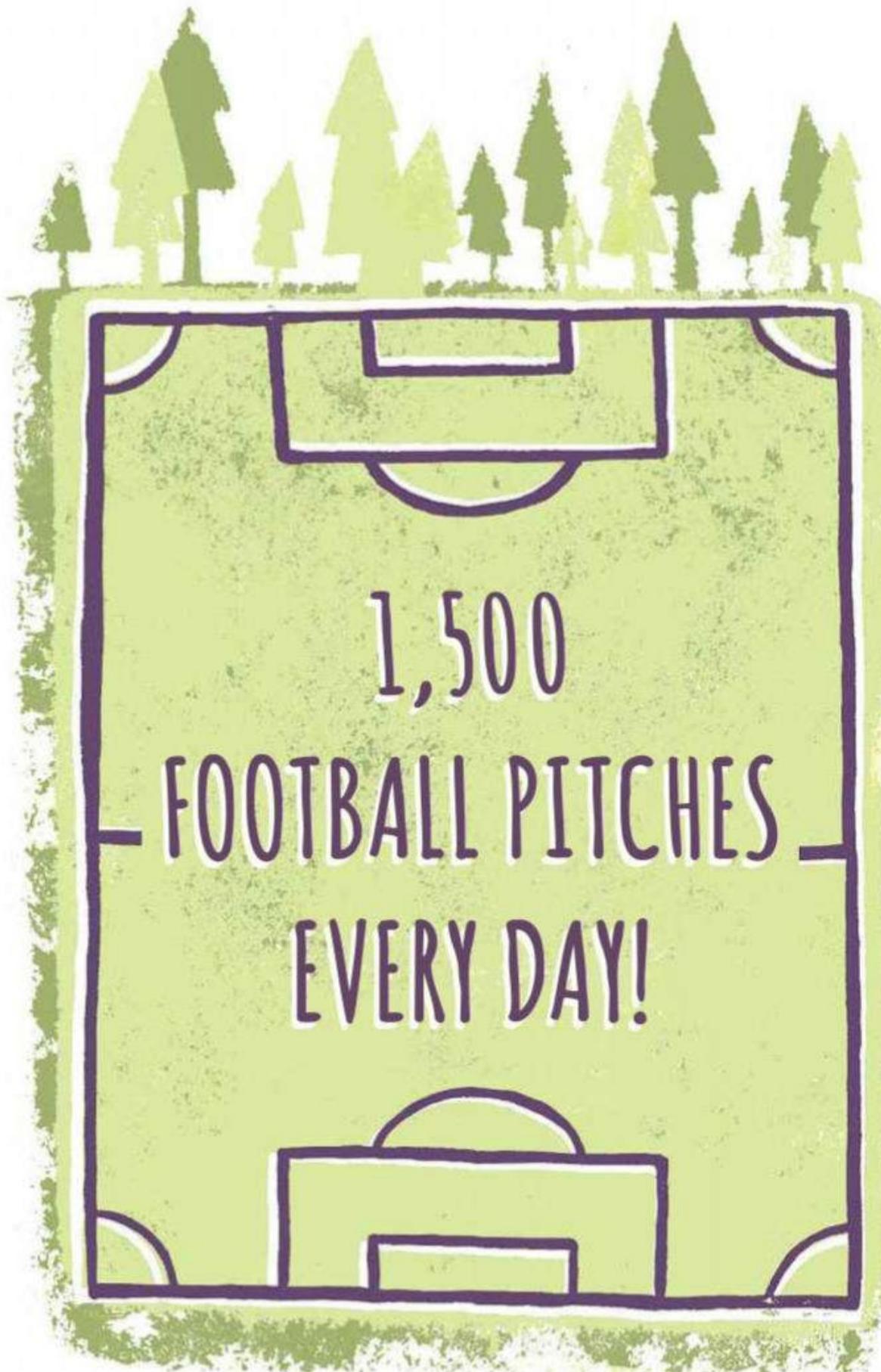
According to the hosts: “The Weird is that which resists any settled explanation or frame of reference. It is the bulging file labelled “other/misc” in our mental filing cabinet, full of supernatural entities, magical synchronicities, and occult rites. But it also appears when a work of art breaks in on our habits of perception and ordinary things become uncanny.”

Several episodes deal with these “works of art”, including a look at David Lynch’s concept of ‘Garmonbozia’ or ‘pain and sorrow’ in *Twin Peaks*, the weird fiction of Arthur Machen and MR James (including some that are readings of stories that are then discussed in depth

in a subsequent episode), *Dungeons and Dragons* and weird gaming, the strange documentary work of Rodney Ascher, the oddness of Andrei Tarkovsky’s 1979 movie *Stalker*, David Cronenberg’s hilarious film of William S Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch*, and an exploration of ‘weird music’ taking in works by Ligeti and others.

Those cultural topics are the most accessible episodes – people might have at least seen the films, listened to the music, or read the authors under discussion. Where *Weird Studies* branches out into more outré subjects is where things might get difficult for some listeners. This is philosophy with a capital P. Their two-part deep dive into the eternal question ‘Does Consciousness Exist’ (Episodes 17 and 18) is a prime example. Over the better part of two hours, Ford and Martel engage with William James’s essay “Does Consciousness Exist?”, bringing in all sorts of philosophical conceptions of consciousness, debating how they apply to human experience, and questioning if we can even trust what we individually seem to understand as our consciousness. Can we trust our own perceptions of the world and how we think?

Several episodes engage with



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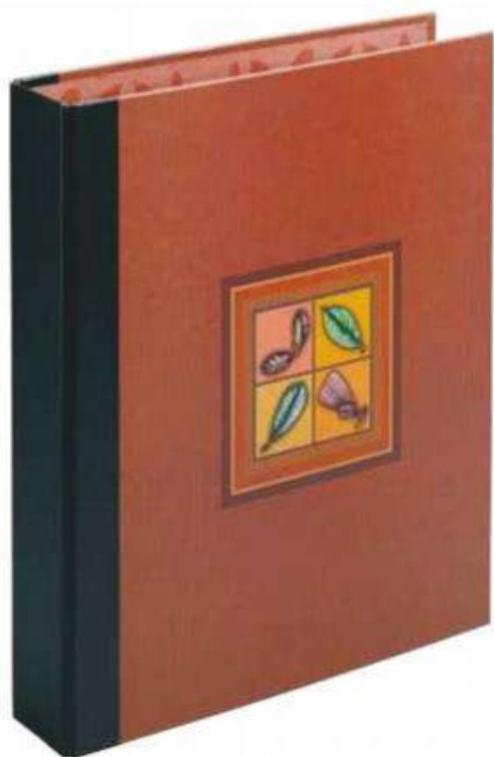
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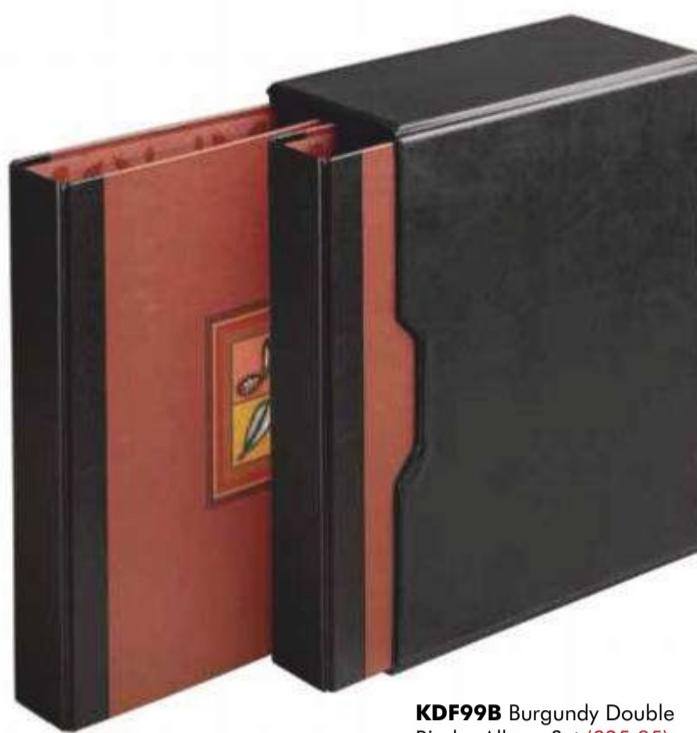
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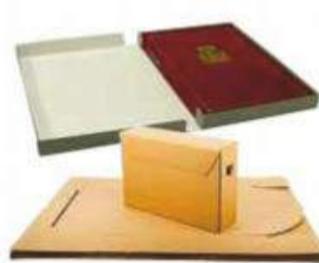
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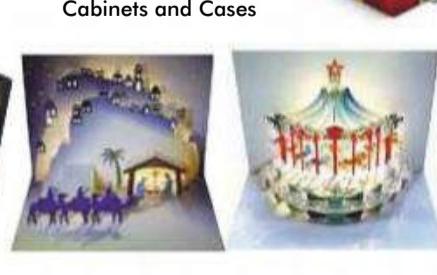
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LETTERS

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Hearing things

It was good to read Benjamin Radford's article on electronic voice phenomena [FT372:46-49]. Since writing a piece on EVP myself for Forum in 2001 [FT152:50], I've undergone a transformation from believer into sceptic. The first point is philosophical. If our brains dictate what we perceive, and our brains have a tendency to construe simulacra, can we ever rule out pareidolia or apophenia?

But if that is check, this next is checkmate. Mary Roach has described an experiment where subjects were told to transcribe a poorly recorded lecture. They wrote down words, indeed sentences. But the tape was unused, and contained nothing but white noise (*Six Feet Over: Adventures in the Afterlife* (2007), p.168). I can vouch for this effect myself. White noise, as Norman Doidge points out, is very stimulating to the auditory cortex (*The Brain that Changes Itself* (2007), p.81). A similar experiment at La Trobe University in Melbourne suggested caffeine could be a factor: heavy coffee drinkers were more likely to hear the song 'White Christmas' in white noise when it was not being played ("Sounds like Bing Crosby? You've had too much coffee", *D. Telegraph*, 7 June 2011).

There is a section of great relevance in Raymond Moody's book *The Last Laugh* (1999). In ancient Greece, oracles claimed to contact the dead through mirror-gazing. Moody reproduced this process in what he called an apparition chamber, and of 100 or so bereaved people, nearly half felt reunited with loved ones, and, crucially, nearly a third heard their voices. The technique of mirror-gazing shares with EVP the elements of sensory reduction and intent communication. Perhaps something like "highway hypnosis" is at play here.

Regarding Anabela Car-doso, her brave next world has disquieting characteristics. She describes two "high entities" called Technician and ABX Juno. Not very inspiring monikers; ABX Juno sounds like a cross between a Roman deity and a bicycle. The "highly evolved" souls that

SIMULACRA CORNER



Giving the finger

Alan Doyle happened upon this "arboreal rebuke" in Epping Forest in 2017. "I'm not sure of the species," he wrote, "but I call this the F-Yew Tree."

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

communicate with her can be manipulative, and were strikingly inconsiderate when she was making a much-loved dog comfortable in its last days (*Electronic Voices* (2010), p.156). As John Keel wrote of a spirit named Fletcher and its communicator: "The entity was apparently completely disinterested in his problems and welfare" (*Operation Trojan Horse* (1970), p.248).

So should we consign EVP to the recycle bin? Certainly not. Hallucinations are the exotic orchids of human consciousness, and simulacra, in their own right, are fascinating. They can be useful (constellations, for instance). "Rorschach audio" has potential: though Rorschach tests are rarely used nowadays, I have obtained via EVP some "close to the bone" insights. EVPs can also, like Leonardo's stains on the wall, stimulate creativity. One of mine, a disturbingly slurred female voice saying "Burn me, trier, and burn the wreckage", made it verbatim into one of my poems. To paraphrase the title of a 1972 book by Peter

Bander: even if no one is talking, carry on listening!

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Fort's blue baby

In Chapter 12 of *The Book of the Damned*, Fort refers to a "blue child born in England". He notes that the Ancient Britons were blue. "Conventional anthropologists" say that the Ancient Britons "only painted themselves blue," he writes. But, Fort suggests, the blue child exhibits "atavism". Intrigued – I initially wondered if this was silver poisoning akin to the late Paul Karason – I checked Fort's source (*Annals of Philosophy* 1819;14:51). The article refers to a paper presented at the Royal Society describing a "blue child" that lived for 21 months. A post-mortem revealed several cardiovascular abnormalities. Cyanosis (a blue tinge to the skin) is a hallmark symptom of some forms of congenital heart disease. So rather than atavism, the poor child seems to have had a congenital

heart disease. Sadly, it seems we can't add the blue child alongside the Green Children of Woolpit to the paediatric rainbow or consider the baby to be a throwback to our ancestors.

Mark Greener
By email

Sign language

Noel Rooney's claim – that the 'OK' or 'chef' hand gesture is not a far right identifier ['Hand Signals' FT372:5] – is problematic, as it was adopted by figures such as Milo Yiannopoulos and Richard Spencer as far back as 2015 and the prevalence of its actual use by far right groups such as The Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer is well documented and listed on the Southern Poverty Law Center's website. Just because the "OK sign as a far right identifier" meme started as a troll on 4chan does not mean that it has not come to be used as an identifier, just as that poor frog did before it.

Elizabeth Veldon
Inverness, Scotland

LETTERS

Outrageous slur

Having read Robert Beckett's interesting exposé of Michael Persinger as a cruel and deplorable man [FT374:72], I was then shocked by his irrelevant introduction of Jordan Peterson's name – seemingly in a bizarre attempt to tar him with the same brush. It was a casual slur, denouncing as 'pseudo-science' Peterson's work as a clinical psychologist and Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto, falsely describing him as a 'cult leader', and contradicting Peterson's verifiable opposition to political extremism of all kinds. Luckily Prof Peterson does not need me to defend him – his complete lectures, and many interviews, are available on YouTube, so FT readers can judge him for themselves.

• I was interested to read Tony Sandy's speculation about stairs and landings perhaps being a common location for ghosts [FT373:71]. Given the in-between, or transitional, nature of those sorts of locations it could be a fascinating line of research to see if they do in fact host more than the usual number of spectres.

My grandmother glimpsed, not a ghost, but my father's doppelgänger standing on the landing of her stairs. He was supposed to have left the house some time earlier to catch a train and, alarmed, my grandmother called out to him to hurry or he'd miss it. He didn't reply and when she went out to accost him there was no one there – he in fact being at the railway station already. This



Hiding in plain sight

I was surprised to read that Richard Freeman failed to find the legendary Gul of Tajikistan [FT373:38-43], when there was clearly one sitting on the roof of the "typical stone hut in the Romit Valley", shown in the photo on page 41.

Mark Tyrrell *By email*

seems to combine the stairs/landing theme with a reverse example of the Norwegian *vardogr* – the phenomenon where you see or hear someone arriving before they actually do: she had seen my father not leave, after he actually had!

Merrily Harpur
Cattistock, Dorset

Hard to photograph

Regarding David Hambling's Forum piece [FT372:55], which relates the difficulty charities have in re-homing black cats – I doubt it's all down to superstition. An animal rescue worker pointed out to me that with the massive increase in charities using the Internet to re-home, black cats are pretty difficult to photograph successfully. It's fine with tabby or tortoiseshell markings, even white cats, but really black cats appear as... well... black blobs with cat's eyes.

Alan Cassidy-Bishop
By email

Fairy Lights

I live in the Welsh Borders and look out for various tales of mystery. I refer you

to pages 124-129 of a little book published in 1914 entitled *Ranmorshire History, Topography and Romance*. Chapter 14. The Otter Hunter's Story – A legend of the Elan Valley.

*Where in cool grot and
Mossy Cell
We rural fays and fairies
dwell.*

The Otter Hunter was a David Jones locally known as 'Clifton'. I have condensed the tale. The writer asked Clifton about the fairies he claims to have encountered in or around the little lakes, streams and small ponds, often referred to as mawn pools – mawn meaning 'peat' in Welsh. The writer asked Clifton whether he had met any of the Gentlefolk on his journey across Eskindderw. "This would be just the evening one would expect to find them dancing upon some green and mossy hillock?" Clifton smiled and said, "Well, Well, so you won't believe in them? If you had seen them as I did..." "Did you really see them Clifton?" "God knows, I tell you the truth sir."

Clifton resting himself on a nearby rock, continues: "It will be 20 years next month that I was hunting otters."

Having caught and killed

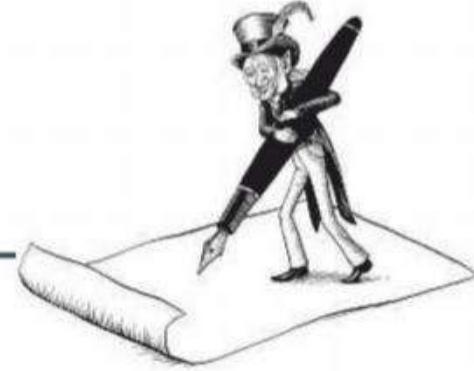
three otters, which were a heavy load, Clifton had five miles to travel to reach Pencaemynydd. It was getting dark. He followed the mountain track as best he could, but within a mile of his destination it became pitch black and he had to cross a big bog. It was dangerous enough in daylight, but after nightfall it was even worse. It began to rain heavily and the three dogs as well as himself were feeling the effects of hunger. He decided the safest thing to do is to stay put until morning when suddenly little lights began to dance before him and showed him the right path as plainly as if the midday sun were shining. He was in a cruel fright, the dogs were whimpering and would not stir from his feet; yet he felt frightened to stay where he was as thoughts of the ghosts said to haunt the old manor of Cwmelan in the valley below added to his fear.

He says, "I felt that the little people were about me and I was powerless to move, fearing the lights would go out and that I would not be able to go forward or back. The wind was getting worse and the rain heavier and suddenly I decided to speak to the fairies civilly. Gentlemen and ladies I says, making a bow to the place where the lights were dancing and asked them would they be so obliging as to light a poor Welshman across the bog. In a moment a blaze from one end to the other a hundred lights were flashing over the bog. I took heart and ventured and wherever I put down my foot the place was as light as day and I walked the swamp as safely as if I had been walking on the road to Pont-ar-Elan. Every inch the light came with me till I reached the stone wall enclosing the little field of Pencaemynydd.

"Then, turning about, I bowed to the fairies. Gentlemen and ladies I said, I'm humbly thankful for your civility and wish you a merry night of it. God bless me as fast as I said it there was a roar of laughter above me, below me and all around me. Out went the lights and it was almost too dark to see. I got home and fainted in the kitchen, but told my wife what had happened when I came



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to. I shall remember it until I die." Many times corpse candles are seen on that bog and ghosts of Cwmelan, but Clifton was the only one that had ever had that experience.

The writer offers Clifton a drop of whisky as he was visibly shaken in retelling the story, but he refused it and said he needed to get home – and the writer of this story agreed, feeling the creepiness of the place.

Roderick Williams
Talgarth, Powys

Photo doubts

There is something seriously awry with the photograph of a "Welsh water spirit" [FT374:4] – 6.15pm on 30 October would be night time, it would be dark; sunset was at 4:48pm, civil twilight extended till 5:24pm and the Moon rose at 9:41pm. There is no way that photograph could have been taken by a hand-held camera. It must have been on a tripod or similar, and with a long exposure, which explains why the woman is blurred as she shifts her position, just as the flowing water is.

Roger J Morgan
London

The river flow blur and the crispness of the foliage indicates a relatively long shutter speed along with a tripod-mounted camera. The photo looks quite bright for one taken one hour 27 minutes after sunset, as claimed.

Terry Haughin
By email

Guy Playfair and Ghostwatch

I was most interested and taken aback to read Alan Murdie's lengthy response [FT373:73] to my own letter [FT370:73] describing Guy Playfair's role as adviser on *Ghostwatch* and my being there when he was present. I don't see how Playfair can possibly "correct" my statement of his role in the production, which I observed first-hand – frankly, is Mr Murdie (a researcher and writer whom I otherwise greatly admire) flat-out calling me a liar?

Furthermore, I have to point

Dowsing defended

In response to Martin Stubbs's letter [FT371:74], please note that James Randi is only a magician – not a scientist – and a magician's trade is misdirection (hoaxing). By his own admission, he's a "trickster, cheat and charlatan" and there's a history of complaints of dishonesty against him. Before anyone relies on his views and quotes him, they'd be wise to search for and read very carefully 'The Myth of James Randi's Million Dollar Challenge' (*The Daily Grail*) and 'James Randi: debunking the king of debunkers' (*Daily Telegraph*).

Randi's methods are, at best, highly questionable. Respected scientists involved with his challenge have stated that his targets are virtually impossible to meet and way above what is considered to be scientific proof of effects. Then, after seeing this side of Randi, people who aren't suffering from a massive dose of confirmation bias should begin to wonder just who is being fooled. But as Ogden Nash said: "I cannot help mentioning that the door of a bigoted mind opens outwards, so that the only result of the pressure of facts upon it is to close it more snugly". Still, everyone is entitled to his or her opinion.

Anyway, anyone who has researched dowsing properly, especially if they have actually tried the mental aspects of it, knows that focus and concentration are necessary to achieve "well above chance" results. Like any other task needing concentration, it can easily be disrupted by stress, pressure and distractions, such as being under test conditions – or even, in some cases, simply by sensing the presence of other people with a negative, biased attitude willing them to fail.

Regarding Dave Miles's more considered comments in the first part of his letter on the same page, I should reiterate that most people can feel their



pendulum being tugged back and forth along the length of the object (or its ghost) on the table by unknown forces. These tugs can be felt irrespective of any slight, natural, hand movements. Indeed, some people who are sensitive to such slight movements often instinctively, perhaps subconsciously, counter them to try to keep their pendulum still. Of course, that also nullifies the tugs trying to build up the pendulum's swings, so it won't move at all – and then they wonder why they can't obtain a reaction. This applies to most other dowsing implements, too. However, people usually get the correct reactions if they're taught not to hold the pendulum still but just to let it dangle and "do its own thing".

In addition, the pendulum would not invariably build up to its maximum swing amplitude along the length of the object (or its ghost), rotate clockwise around one end and rotate anti-clockwise around the other end, if tiny, natural hand movements were causing the reactions. If they were, the pendulum would just swing according to the direction of the hand movements, irrespective of where the object (or its ghost) is (or was). This clearly demonstrates that there is an interaction between the pendulum and the object (and its ghost), due to unknown forces that must be independ-

ent of any slight hand movements.

And if "you may unwittingly influence your pendulum according to your expectations" was a valid statement, then you'd expect the pendulum's reactions over the object's ghost to continue for as long as the original location of the object stays in your memory. For hours? Or days? Or years? But it doesn't. The ghost gradually fades away and the pendulum's reactions reduce accordingly, even if you do remember exactly where the object was located. This tends to confirm, yet again, that external forces are involved – and that your expectations have no bearing on them.

Ian H Machell
Staverton, Wiltshire

I read 'Water magic' [FT364:4-5] with interest since as a child I was introduced to dowsing for water and found that I can do so. Over 50 years ago my father was looking for a water pipe (the reason why escapes me now) and a friend was dowsing for it using two heavy gauge lengths of wire about 18in [46cm] long, bent into a L-shape with the short part held so that both were pointing directly ahead. With this he exactly located the pipe, the wires swivelling inwards to cross exactly over it. I was invited to try and found I could do the same. I held the wires loosely and as they passed over the water they swung inwards and crossed at the exact point of the pipe. I was aware of no sensations other than the wires moving in my hands. If I held them tight then I could feel them trying to move over water. Since then I have used this 'gift' a few times to find pipes and blockages in underground drains by walking over the line of the drain until the wires uncross and straighten as I pass over the blockage holding the water back. I am at a loss to explain how it works. However, I know it does!

Jim Eccleston
By email

out some misinformation in his reply. He reproduces the error of fact uttered by Playfair and which I have corrected many times over the years: There was no producer named "Hilary Manning". The producer's name was Ruth Baumgarten. The director was named Lesley Manning. We didn't tell Guy we were "ripping off" his book because, in my opinion, we weren't. I've repeated this until I'm blue in the face. Yes, the BBC "settled quickly" – although both Ruth Baumgarten and I wanted to fight the copyright infringement case. Ask yourself why, if I thought I was "ripping him off", would I give Playfair a copy of my script on 5 June 1992?

We had no intention of using his credit "at the top of the programme" and, in fact, didn't. It comes up in the end credits roll (which anybody who had watched it would know) – and for a few hours' work, that isn't bad. The idea that using Guy to give the impression he "approved of the programme" might be what he felt, but it is nevertheless untrue. Who in the TV viewing audience would give a jot if Guy Playfair "approved" *Ghostwatch* – and it was a matter of indifference to myself and the team. (As I seem to have to say yet again – he was brought in, at my request, to meet the director and actors to talk about his direct personal experience of poltergeists. No more, no less.) After I gave him the script – (not to advise on, since it was already in production, but out of courtesy) – he did not make any rumblings about plagiarism at all. I remember him saying "You realise this could cause a bit of a stir." That was it.

Maurice Grosse was correct in saying he was never an adviser on the production. He was approached to provide suitable ghost story "vox pops" for the purpose of cutaways in the programme as indicated in the script. I have checked with Lesley, the director, and she says he knew it was a drama, and he was happy to do so. As for my supposed "sheepish grin" in reaction to Grosse's accusation of things "unashamedly appropriated" from Enfield in *Ghostwatch* – I don't recall the incident, but I imagine I was taken aback, and did not take it seriously enough to deny it.

As a final point, there was no

DAILY UFO FLIGHT PATTERNS
(British, American), 37½ p. **UFO Map,**
S. England, 37½ p. **TV Notes on UFO**
Detection, and 2 Optical Circuits, 50p.
Radar & Electronic Publications, "High-
lands," Needham Market, Suffolk.

ENGINEERING SERVICE for construc-
tors. Lathe work, milling, sheet metal,
castings, etc. S.A.E. for details. Chelms-
ford Machine Tool Company. P.O. Box

UFO detection by TV

Wandering around the Internet the other night, I came across this advertisement (above) in the highly reputable British journal, *Practical Wireless* Vol.46 No.11, Issue 769, (Mar 1971, p.979). It constitutes hard evidence of something I had experience of as a child: the contacting of UFOs through the TV set – a neglected art.

Although a UFO Detection Network was set up across the UK by the *Flying Saucer Review* in the late-1960s, it mostly depended on compass-needle or electronic magnetic field detectors, such as the Colin McCarthy Magnetic Flux Detector recommended in *FSR* vol.14, no.5 (Sept/Oct 1968, p.29). The only other instance of TV UFO Detection I know of is from the USA: a spectacular audio-only recording by Bill Whorrall of the Horizontal Hubcap Network in Indiana in 1990 (Leonard Lander, *Beyond The Dial*, ORB Editions Feb 2009, p.42).

Conversely, the only documented case of UFOs or aliens contacting humans through television is the still unsolved mystery of the live Southern TV news programme broadcast that was interrupted by an alien named Vrillon of the Ashtar Galactic Command in England in 1977 (maybe it was an inside job?).

The tuning circuitry of analogue televisions is pretty basic, especially on older portable monochrome sets, so it shouldn't be that difficult for someone with the necessary knowledge and experience to modify a TV set so that it can receive wider transmissions, if such a thing is possible. Is anyone out there doing this?

Mark Reeve By email

"researcher" on the programme to my knowledge – so whoever Mr Grosse says was forthcoming about Enfield being the "role model" for our drama, this is news to me.

Finally, as I have said before in these pages, I'm happy for the public to make up their own minds about the *Ghostwatch*/Enfield question. Guy Playfair, in the end, was too. I greatly respected him and his work, and he knew that. Our meetings were always convivial and it's a great shame this debate rumbles on with so many attached inaccuracies. Still, *Ghostwatch* is remembered 26 years after its transmission, and still, to my astonishment and delight, regularly finds new fans and new praise. The culmination of which, in many ways, was the tribute to it in the form of the recent pre-Hallowe'en "live" episode of *Inside Number 9*, which actor-

writer Reece Shearsmith texted me to say was a "love letter" to our own Hallowe'en ghost story back in 1992. And I value Guy's contribution to our production, even if he, ultimately, didn't.

Stephen Volk

Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire

Editor's note: This correspondence is now closed.

Saved by his brother

I came upon this remarkable yarn in *Opening Heaven's Door: Investigating Stories of Life, Death, and What Comes After*, by Patricia Pearson, (Simon & Schuster, 2014), and thought it worth sharing with FT readers:

In his memoir about fighting in World War I, the journalist William Bird described what was, for him, the most extraordinary chapter in the battle. He was in France in April 1917, sleeping

beneath a groundsheet amid the muddy and mazelike trenches after the battle of Vimy Ridge. In the cool darkness, he was awoken by the grip of someone shaking him. He tried to pull away, exhausted and irritable, but the grip held with some urgency, so he opened his eyes and saw, to his confusion and surprise, his brother Steve, who had been reported missing in action two years earlier.

"Steve grinned as he released my hands, then put his warm hand over my mouth as I started to shout my happiness. He pointed to the sleepers in the bivvy and to my rifle and equipment. 'Get your gear,' he said softly."

While Bird tried to work out in his mind how his brother had even located him, he obediently followed Steve away from the other sleeping men and down the trench. By the time it occurred to him to ask where they were going, his brother rounded a corner – and vanished. Bird searched for him frantically, but eventually reconciled himself to the conclusion that he had been asleep on his feet, dreaming. His brother, come to think of it, had been kitted out in the uniform and cap worn in 1915, two years out of date. It had to have been a dream for sure. In despair, Bird gave up looking for him, and fell asleep where he was, after crawling into a funk hole.

The next morning, he was awakened by his battalion mates, who were excited to have found him alive. They took him to the bivvy where he had been sleeping before he'd moved to show him that it had been hit by a high-explosive shell. The bodies of the men who had remained there were beyond recognition. The incident was such a profound part of his war experience that Bird titled his subsequent memoir *Warm Hands*.

Edward Young

London

Chinese teddy

I couldn't help noticing that in the picture of a screen in the *Forbidden City* [FT371:61], the yellow dragon has a teddy bear's face between its horns and little teddy paws over each eye. I don't know whether anyone else can see this, or have I finally tipped over the edge? Anyway, it amused me.

Pamela Thornton

By email

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Southport stories

Pixie-led

Having grown up in Southport, I particularly enjoyed Rob Gandy's article about my old town's strange stories [FT370:42-45]. The account of Mrs T and her son driving along what ought to have been a familiar road and finding it suddenly differently configured, along with the disappearance of the other car they overtook, prompted me to report my own very recent Southport experience of becoming utterly lost in a landscape I knew, but that seemed to change shape around me.

My favourite haunt as a teenager, and indeed to this day, some 30 years later, is the Birkdale Dunes nature reserve that wraps around Hillside Golf Club and Royal Birkdale Golf Club. It's a beautiful part of the celebrated Sefton Coast, and after you've walked for 15 or 20 minutes and got beyond the parts frequented by dog walkers, it gets very peaceful and rather wild. Recent work to replace the golf clubs' boundary fences has made some formerly inaccessible parts of the reserve somewhat easier to reach, and I have latterly enjoyed finding new ways from the coastal side of the reserve to its inland boundary. In early September 2018, I was looking for a certain path that leads from one area I knew very well to another I wanted to explore again. It was late afternoon, a couple of hours before sunset, with good weather, clear visibility, and some high cloud. I had used this path before and knew exactly where it should be, between the golf club's fence and some bushes, but on this occasion all that was there was impenetrable scrub pressed right up to the fence. Determined to find my way around, and thinking that I might have misremembered the location of the path, I headed in another direction, following the vestige of a neglected, winding track, ducking under branches and stretching myself over thorny



undergrowth, until I emerged close to a sandhill that I could climb for a better view. At its top I looked around and realised to my surprise that I couldn't see anything I recognised. I could hear the coastal road behind me, but couldn't see the golf course. It didn't make sense, and I thought I'd better retrace my steps and get back to familiar territory to think again, but now I couldn't even locate the track I'd just come along! I tried multiple directions, but all of them led either to deep bogs or dense brush. By now I was decidedly uneasy. I had a strong sense that the landscape was playing with me – indeed, I had a feeling of panic (originally a certain type of fear engendered by the god Pan). Then, trying a route I'd already unsuccessfully attempted, but with renewed resolve to get out of there, I found my way with relative ease back to where I had come from. That was puzzling enough, but then I spotted the path I'd been unable to locate just 15 minutes earlier, right where it should have been! I felt that I had been firmly humbled by the wisdom and spirit of this potent landscape.

Rocking car

I have an earlier strange story from the same area. Some time

"I had a sense that the landscape was playing with me – indeed, I had a feeling of panic"

between autumn 1991 and autumn 1992 (during a year between college and university), I had driven with my friend to the small, informal parking area near the Royal Birkdale Golf Club building for a chat and a furtive cigarette. It was a little after sunset when we arrived, and there was nobody around; no other cars were parked, and there was no sign of activity at the golf club. We were about 300m from the nearest road or streetlight, facing roughly south-west. We'd been talking for a while when the car suddenly began to rock violently, as if someone had grabbed the rear offside wheel arch and started rhythmically lifting it. We immediately looked around, but it was too dark to see anything outside the car. "What the hell is that?" I asked. My friend just said "Bob, drive!" I started the car and got out of there. The rocking seemed to continue right up to the point at which I drove away. I went

straight ahead before turning hard left to head back the way we'd come in, without passing the same spot. We stopped when we got back on the road to discuss what might have happened. My first thought was, as you'd imagine, that a couple of kids had been out there and had got a laugh from playing a prank. But even though we'd had the windows down a little (since we were smoking in the car), we had heard no laughter, nor any voices, and it seemed very unlikely that anyone would be walking out there in the dark, on an unlit track leading only to the sandhills. Furthermore, it'd take some nerve to start shaking a car with the two of us sitting in it. It would have to have been someone prepared to either run off into the darkness or go face-to-face with the occupants of the vehicle. Either way, that's unusually confident behaviour for someone young enough to find such shenanigans amusing. But what else could it have been?

Old trash

My final eerie tale from the Sefton coast also comes from 1992 (sometime between March and October), but further south in the sandhills at Formby. It was daytime, most likely afternoon as I usually worked in the mornings, and the weather was of the neutral, greyish but dry type, well known in the area. At the bottom of a valley formed between two of the bigger dunes around the Freshfield / Formby area, I found a circle of large dog prints, each about 3-4in (8-10cm) long, in the slightly wet sand. The circle was around 8ft (2.5m) in diameter. No prints led to the circle, and none led away. I remember checking carefully for faded prints and being quite convinced that there were none, as well as being impressed by how circular the trail was. The discovery brought to mind the tales of Formby's ghostly black dog, 'Old Trash'.

Rob Bray

Old Stratford, Northamptonshire

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX HAG STONES

HUNT EMERSON

AN INTERESTING NATURAL PHENOMENON IS THE HAG STONE - A STONE WITH A HOLE THROUGH IT, CAUSED BY THE ACTION OF WATER...



THEY ARE WIDELY HELD TO HAVE MAGICAL POWERS!

THEY'RE NOT UNUSUAL - HERE'S A FEW ON A SHELF IN WHITBY, YORKSHIRE, WHERE THEY ARE KNOWN AS ADDER STONES...



...BECAUSE THEY ARE A CURE FOR SNAKEBITE!

STOP BITING ME, SNAKE! I'VE GOT AN ADDERSTONE!

SO WHAT? YOU TASTE NICE!



HAG STONES, OR WITCHES' STONES, ALSO PROTECT AGAINST EYE DISEASES...

LOOK THROUGH THE HOLE - SO LONG AS YOU CAN SEE SOMETHING YOU WON'T BE BLIND!

TRUST ME - I'M A DRUID...



...AND WHOOPING COUGH!

JUST TRY AND WHOOP THROUGH THE HOLE...

TRUST ME - I'M A DRUID!



THEY ALSO PREVENT NIGHTMARES!

WAKE UP! YOU'RE ABOUT TO HAVE A BAD DREAM!

OUCH! I WAS DREAMING OF A SNAKE CRAWLING THROUGH A STONE!

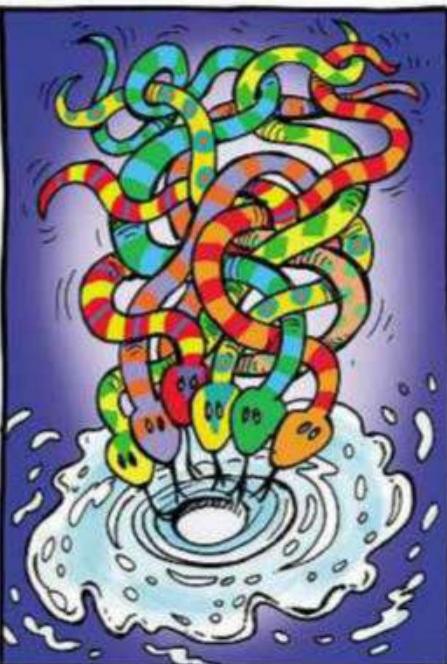


IN SCOTTISH GAELIC THEY'RE CALLED "GLOINE NAN DRUIDH" - DRUIDS' GLASS...

...AND YOU CAN SEE THROUGH FAIRY OR WITCH DISGUISES BY LOOKING THROUGH THE HOLE...



TRADITION SAYS THEY ARE THE HARDENED SALIVA OF A MASS OF SNAKES, WITH THE HOLE BEING CAUSED BY THEIR TONGUES! UNPLEASANT, BUT FORTUNATELY NOT TRUE...

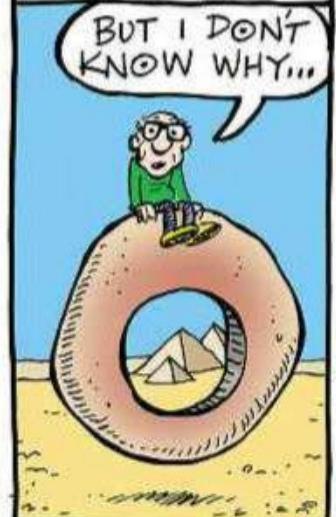


IN GERMANY THEY ARE CALLED "HÜHNERGÖTTER", WHICH MEANS "CHICKEN GODS"... WHO KNOWS WHAT IS GOING ON THERE!?



AND IN EGYPT THEY ARE "AGGRI"...

BUT I DON'T KNOW WHY...



COMING NEXT MONTH



AN AFRICAN MYSTERY

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE DECAPITATED UNICORN



WALKING THE WORLD

TALES FROM THE ANNALS OF HYPERPEDESTRIANISM



MISHIMA'S UFOS,
LUNAR GHOSTS,
THE COSMIC JOKER,
AND MUCH MORE...

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376

ON SALE 31 JAN 2019

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A freelance scientific researcher shot dead his friend with a bullet he claimed had magical powers. Thongrob Tojinda, 51, was arrested at his house in Pathum Thani's Muang district on 30 September after firing a shot into his friend's right temple. Bancha Kunnawut-opas, 43, an electrical engineer, died on impact. Thongrob told police that he and his friend were drinking together when he boasted that he had magic bullets after placing them in water that had been blessed by a monk. Bancha argued that all bullets became defective after they were put in water, and challenged Thongrob to fire into his head, as the bullets would be dud. Thongrob took up the challenge, but the bullet proved neither magical nor a dud and Bancha died. *The Nation (Thailand)*, 1 Oct 2018.

A Japanese couple were arrested after imprisoning their daughter for more than 15 years before she froze to death, aged 33, in December 2017. Yasutaka Kakimoto, 55, and his wife Yukari, 53, from Osaka, locked their daughter Airi in a small room from the age of 16 or 17. They claimed she was mentally ill and acted violently. An autopsy showed she weighed just 42lb (19kg). *D.Telegraph*, 28 Dec 2017.

A 51-year-old driver was towing another vehicle out of a mud bank in central Queensland when the towing strap snapped, causing it to smash through the back window and hit the man in the head. Witnesses performed CPR, but he died at the scene. *(Queensland) Courier Mail*, 19 Mar 2018.

Pavel Matveev, 15, becoming frustrated with a computer game, walked into the garden of his home in the village of Mogochino, Russia, and beheaded himself with a chainsaw. Russian media cited local sources saying that he was addicted to a computer his mother had bought for him. It was not stated what game he was playing. *mirror.co.uk*, 4 Sept 2018.

Georgia Newnham, 11, was found dead in her bed at her home in Peacehaven, East Sussex, on 15 May 2017. In her hand was a can of Sure spray-on deodorant. She had been using aerosol deodorant for about two years because she didn't like using a roll-on. She would often sweat in the night and was self-conscious about body odour. Her step mother, Cassandra Copping, told the inquest in September 2018 that she would use the aerosol once a day before

going to school, adding: "She never, ever put her deodorant on under her duvet." She said Georgia was "100 per cent not abusing solvents." *D.Telegraph*, 5 Sept 2018.

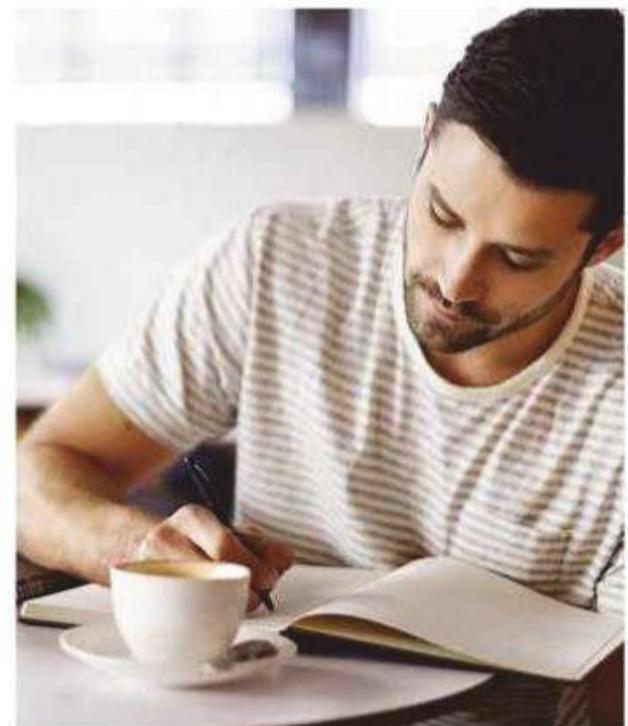
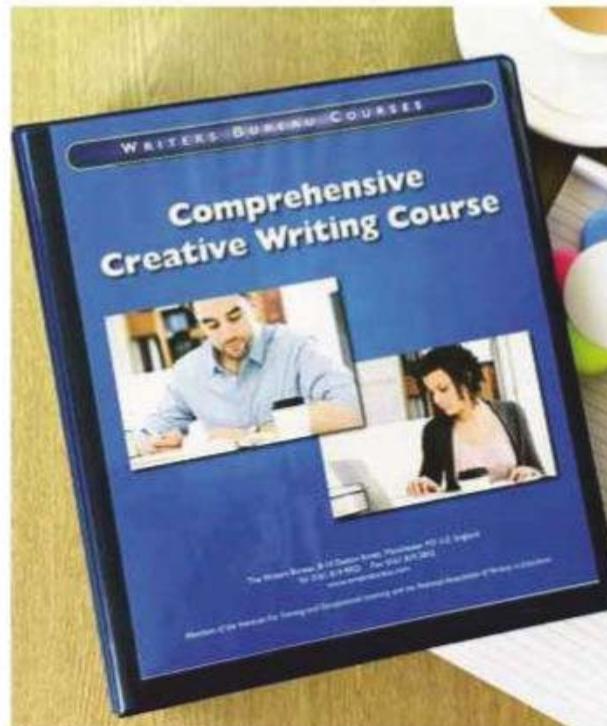
A New York man was strangled by his own shirt after it got caught in a subway escalator and choked him to death after a night drinking. Carlos Alvarez, 48, was at the Intervale Station in the Bronx, New York, around 3.45am on 14 October when he fell onto a subway escalator and his shirt got stuck. The neckline choked him as he tried in vain to free himself. Witnesses attempted to help save Alvarez, who had blood pouring out of his head. NYPD officers cut the shirt off to free him and he was rushed to Lincoln Hospital, where he was pronounced dead. *dailymail.com*, 15 Oct 2018.

A 34-year-old British cyclist was been shot dead at about 6pm on 13 October in an apparent hunting accident in the French Alps. Marc Sutton, from Caerphilly in Wales, was killed while cycling down a path through a wooded area near the ski resort of Les Gets, in the southeastern Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes region, where he ran the Wild Beets vegetarian restaurant. He is believed to have died instantly. The bullet was fired by a 22-year-old gunman, who was with a hunting group; he was admitted to hospital for shock. Police said he might have mistaken Sutton for a deer or a boar; but Philippe Toccanier, prosecutor for the Thonon-Les-Bains region, said that Sutton "couldn't be confused with game, as he had a coloured helmet and a coloured mountain bike".

The death was the latest in a series of fatal shootings involving hunters in France in recent months. In December, a 59-year-old hiker was killed by a wild boar hunter close to the village of Taulignan. A 69-year-old woman was shot and killed by a hunter the previous October while sitting in her garden in Taussac. And in September 2017, a 13-year-old boy was apparently mistakenly shot dead by his grandfather during a hunting trip near the village of Triaize. *Sky News*, *theweek.co.uk*, 15 Oct 2018.

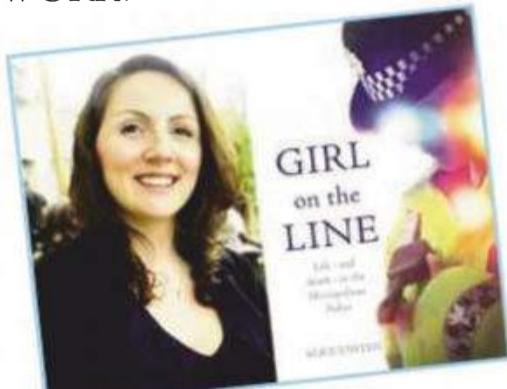
Anthony Montoya, 18, from Hollis, Oklahoma, was mauled to death by a bear and her two cubs on remote Admiralty Island off the coast of Alaska while working at a silver mine site only accessible by helicopter. Encounters with bears on the island are rare. State troopers said the bears had been killed before their arrival. *Metro*, 3 Oct 2018.

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